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ERRANT.

A LIFE-STORY OF LATTER-DAY CHIVALRY.

BY

PERCY GREG,

AUTHOR OF "ACROSS THE ZODIAC," ETC.

" And yet—the Light that led astray
Was Light from Heaven ! "

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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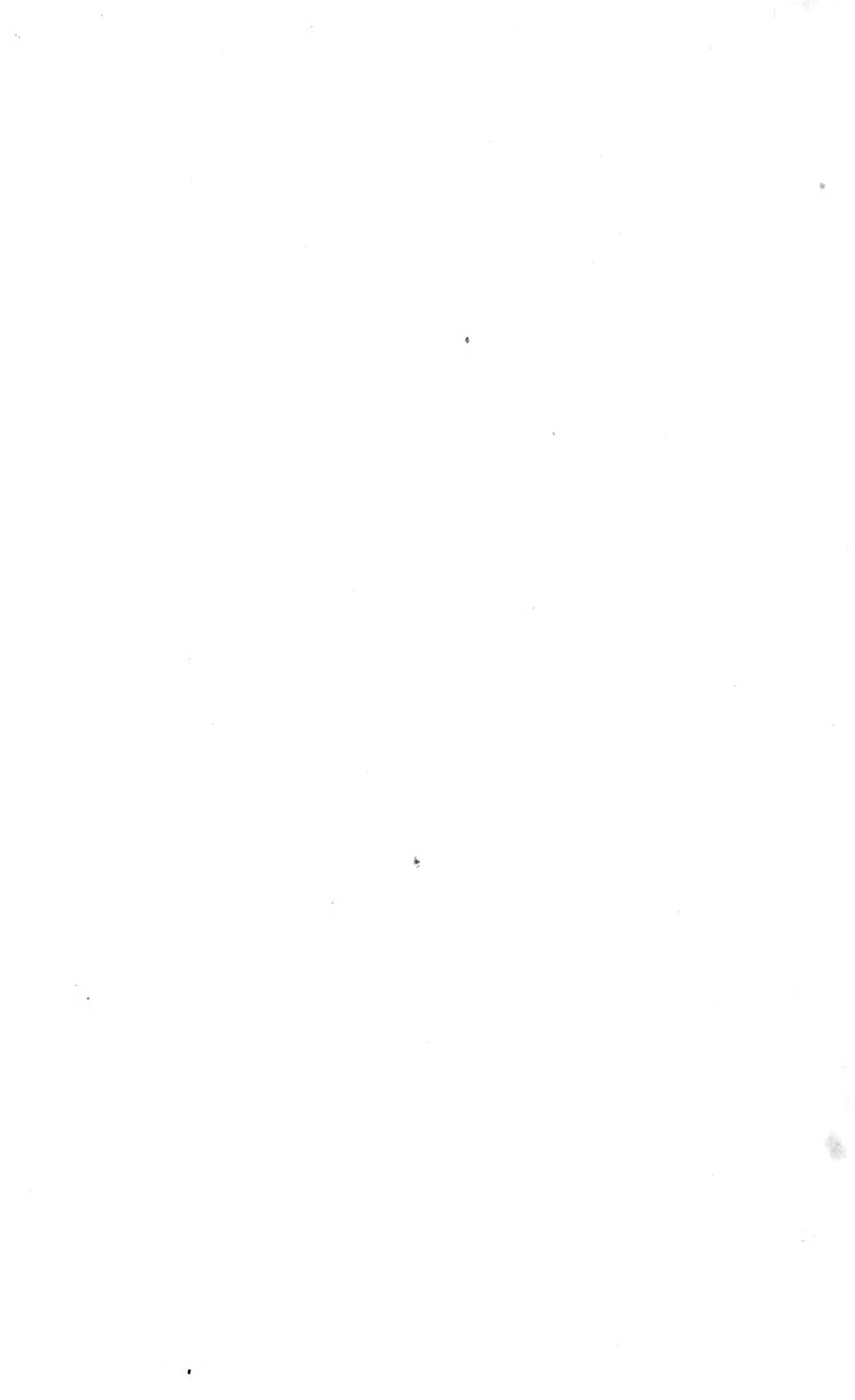
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ERRANT.



CHAPTER I.

PISTOL-PRACTICE EXTRAORDINARY.

“The shadows of his stormy life that instant fell apart,
And they who blamed the bloody hand forgave the loving heart.”

THE sun had risen, but his rays did not directly pierce the masses of foliage, and he had not reached a height from which they could shine straight down into the open glade, in which next morning two men stood back to back at thirty paces, with pistol in hand, in closely buttoned coats showing no spot of white. At ten paces from each, across the line between them, lay large stakes marking the limits of their permitted advance. Colonel Marion, the young American officer, and a surgeon stood aside some ten paces from the centre of the line.

“I shall give the signal,” said the elder second. “When I clap my hands the third time, you will turn, and fire when you please. One—two—three.”

Both wheeled and stepped forward; the Louisianian with tolerable firmness but with a rather pale face, flushed here and there, as if he had striven after a

restless night to steady his nerves with something stronger than coffee. His antagonist paced the ground with the measured tread and erect bearing of a soldier on parade, with an absolute composure in whose very calmness a certain constraint and effort might have been detected. Now for the first time an observer might have seen that each carried not an ordinary duelling pistol but a revolver. One barrel, however, of each only was loaded. Lionel, his arm slightly bent, but perfectly free from the sort of stiffness perceptible to a practised eye in the similar position of his antagonist's limb, kept his weapon steadily levelled at the other's breast and looked him directly in the eyes. Whether so intended or not, the sight of the barrel thus pointed and the steady gaze disturbed Dampierre's nerves, if they did not actually shake his courage. Whatever deficiency of the latter might be conjectured, or might actually exist, was due rather to the weakness or unsteadiness of spirit and frame produced by dissipation, than to any discreditable unwillingness or inability to face death with at least average readiness. But perfect coolness would have preserved him from the error of firing at the fifth pace, while twenty steps still parted him from an adversary whose marksmanship he knew to be far superior to his own. It was not surprising that his shot utterly missed. If the rule of that manner of combat, and Louisianian notions of fair play, would have allowed the unhurt and still armed duellist to avail himself further of the right of advance, and permitted him to aim at leisure, Lionel had no idea of taking so questionable an advantage. Within a

couple of seconds the report of his pistol followed the other, and the raised right arm of his antagonist dropped to his side, while a low half-suppressed cry or scream told how acute was the pain of the wound. In another instant Dampierre staggered, and fell before the surgeon could reach him.

The seconds ran to assist; the victor, knowing that his aid was as needless as it might be unwelcome, stood a little apart, till Colonel Marion, leaving the wounded man, came to his side.

"You have shattered his elbow," said the latter in a low tone.

"I am sorry to hear it," replied his principal. "He must have moved his elbow at the moment then, I suppose. I meant to break the bone below it. For that reason, if he had not fired first, I should have taken the shortest distance allowed me. When one's own life hangs on the shot, one's aim may be a little shaken, and at twenty paces one might be tempted to make too sure."

What instinct or habit induced Lionel as he returned to load every barrel of the revolver he had carried empty to the field, he himself could never have told. It was his practice, however, since the auction day had so painfully impressed upon him the value of his own life, always to be armed; though invariably keeping his weapon carefully concealed, to avoid the provocation to quarrel that seems to be involved in the open display of deadly weapons. Indeed in that society in which he moved, in the expeditions of sport or business in which he was frequently engaged, occasion for the use of the pistol

was scarcely more probable than in England. With nearly all the white men around him he was on friendly terms, and from his slaves he never dreamed of danger. On the contrary, he would not have hesitated at need to arm them in defence of their master, and of the place which they all considered almost as much and as permanently their home as his. He still carried the weapon in his breast when, springing from his horse under the portico, he entered by the front door. Throwing his hat and whip as usual in the embrasure of the nearest window, and encumbered by the revolver, he laid it unawares beside them; contrary to the practice he had observed ever since he had been not a little annoyed and alarmed by finding it undergoing a curious and somewhat dangerous examination in the hands of Rose and Eugenie. Passing on into the study, he rang, and the bell was answered by Cassia, not by Cora, who was at that moment in attendance on her young mistress; and it was therefore to Cassia that his orders were given, though as it happened he did not notice which of the servants received them.

“Will you bring my breakfast here at once, and tell Miss Florence I shall be glad if, an hour hence or so, she will come to me here. Tell her it has been raining all night, and the garden is too wet to be pleasant: and ask her, if she will not mind it, to come by herself.”

More disturbed than he had chosen to appear before the witnesses of the duel, Lionel unconsciously spoke with clouded face and in an irritable tone, of which Cassia was not the only observer. Hardly intending

to play the spy, Eugenie had watched his return, noticed his unusually rapid pace and gloomy look, and stood concealed with some half-formed purpose close to the open window as the message was given. As the speaker turned in that direction, she ran back under the portico, and was screened from his sight as he went to visit the stable. Loitering in the hall, she caught some fragments of Cassia's muttering as the latter passed through the gallery on her errand.

"You'll catch it this time, Missy," she growled to herself, but audibly, unaware that any one was within hearing. "If he thinks you deserve the cowhide, he ain't so far wrong; and—'infamous treachery!'—well, that sounds better'n I hoped for. I'd ha' thought he'd ha' given her anything, and kept it to themselves, before he'd ha' spoken so about her to me."

Cassia perhaps "reasoned right from wrong premises." Her master could doubtless as soon have outraged his own reverence for his ward by personal violence, as by opprobrious language applied to her in a servant's presence. It had never occurred to the slave-woman that the anger of a gentleman was turned, primarily and almost exclusively, upon the male offender. As Eugenie heard and pieced Cassia's misconceptions on to her own, her eye fell on the revolver. At first she took it up in mere wilful mischief, perhaps from that instinct of disobedience which was strong in her wayward temper. Presently some thought occurred to her, and carefully concealing it under her dress she carried off the weapon,

hoping that its owner would not miss it, or would not ask her what had become of it, before the time at which a half-theatrical, half-passionate, wholly childish fancy suggested that it might be made effective.

“What have I done with my revolver?” said Lionel to himself, as he re-entered the study some ten minutes later. “I have not got it about me, and I can hardly have taken it out in the stable. It is not over-wise to leave such a thing about, either. In spite of the lecture I gave them about meddling with firearms, I doubt if Eugenie’s or Rose’s fingers would not be again tempted by the very danger. Well, I suppose they’re at breakfast now; when I’ve done my own I will find it, before they can get into mischief.”

But when the tray was removed, he sought the weapon in vain throughout the study, and equally in vain in the stable. Some accident caused him to return from the rear of the house through the hall, which, as has been said, led directly from the front door to the court, at right angles to the gallery that formed the front of the main building and connected the turret-like wings. As he turned into the gallery, Eugenie stopped him with an eager and excited air, but her purpose was not very intelligible. In truth, she hardly knew how to enter on the subject in her mind; and he, the morning’s irritation revived by the fruitless search, and anticipating with anything but pleasure the momentarily approaching interview with Florence, shook her off somewhat impatiently. Repenting the next moment of seeming unkindness, he

turned with his hand on the handle of the study door, and to his infinite surprise and annoyance saw the missing weapon in the hands of the most restless and excitable of his chattels; saw too, though he hardly noticed for the moment, that her cheeks were flushed with an unusual depth of colour, and that even more excitement than was common in her most passionate moods sparkled in her eyes and trembled in her quivering lip.

“You foolish child! Give me that directly, and never touch it again! In such hands as yours it might be the death of one of your sisters, and make your life a misery ever after. Eugenie, I don’t like to speak to you of command or obedience; but I will *not* have that one rule set at nought. Give it me at once.”

Amazed at the tacit refusal, emphasized by the girl’s retreat to a greater distance, he was about to enforce the very reasonable command, when, lifting the weapon, and with her hand, as he noticed to his no small alarm, on the trigger, she cried—

“Not till you promise me you won’t——”

“Give it me this instant!” he exclaimed, observing that the revolver was, intentionally or otherwise, directly levelled at his breast, and that a slight movement, very probable in the child’s excitement, might send the ball through his heart. He advanced towards her, catching up the cane from the window, intending in case of need to strike aside either the weapon or the hand that held it; aware of the imminent risk to both if, closing with her, the girl should resist his attempt to wrest it by force from her grasp. As she still evaded him, feeling that the danger could

not be trifled with, and naturally angry as well as alarmed—

“Put it down this instant!” he exclaimed, “or—”

Expecting a blow which he could not bear to strike till too late, excited beyond self-control or self-recollection, the child pressed the trigger. Fortunately for both, she had not calculated the effort required to discharge, not a toy such as one sees nowadays in many English houses, but an effective military six-shooter. Eugenie had no idea of the manner in which in unpractised hands the weight of the “pull,” to use a technical phrase, and the movement of the barrel itself, divert the aim. The ball which, as she held the pistol the moment before, would have gone straight through Lionel’s breast, actually grazed his left arm and broke the window nearest to him. For a moment both stood in equal amaze and horror:—the girl suddenly shocked into a partial perception of the nature of her impulsive act; the man more utterly astounded than either alarmed or angry, but very much alarmed and—as is often the case with men and women whose courage is matter of will and not of insensible nerves—very angry indeed under the first impulse of extreme surprise and fear, as well as the sting of sharp bodily pain. Of course the latter first recovered power to will and act; and before Eugenie realized what she had done, much more before she could think or move, he had snatched the weapon from her grasp, caught her up, and almost flung her into the study.

“You little fiend!” he exclaimed, as the door slammed behind them.

Panting, whether from want of breath or from still

persisting agitation, seizing her again with more roughness than he was aware, a moment or two passed before he added, still under the same first impulse, "If you are child enough to commit murder in sheer childish passion, you are child enough to smart for it!"

Eugenie, to do her justice, had acted on the passionate but still hardly more than half-conscious impulse of a moment. She had possessed herself of the revolver with the half-formed, very ridiculous idea of interposing to protect her sister from—she hardly knew what. When she pointed it and refused to give it up, her thought was still to exact a promise by threats which she had no idea of fulfilling; and perhaps surprise and terror had as much as anger to do with that pressure on the trigger which might so easily have cost the loss of one life, and not improbably the incurable unendurable misery of others. Shocked by her own act, even more than terrified by violence the more alarming as coming from one who had always been so gentle and forbearing to her, she had attempted neither resistance nor appeal. What was coming she had hardly time to wonder or to fear; and, happily perhaps for himself, Lionel never knew how far in the execution of his menace anger would have carried him before self-recollection interposed. Neither of them heard the gentle tap at the door. Eugenie had her back turned to it, but Lionel started, recalled to partial self-possession at least, and relaxed without quite releasing his grasp of the frightened child, as Florence's timid gentle countenance appeared. Her look of utter astonishment, it seemed to

him reproachful astonishment, abashed and sobered him at once ; and in another moment he had dropped his hold on Eugenie altogether, as he strove to answer that look with an affectation of something like composure.

“ I don’t defend myself, Florence. I know nothing would excuse to you such rough treatment of your sister. But—is there no limit to what a man must bear from anything in petticoats ? ”

Startled by a bitterness and roughness of tone strangely contrasting the deference to herself evinced in his usual manner and language, by a countenance which would not be calm, and a voice which *would* tremble, Florence was even more astounded than at first. Surely no offence of Eugenie’s could have so affected him ? Was he vindicating a right to deal as roughly with herself ? She was silent in a dismay which he mistook for persistent displeasure.

“ I know what you will say. She is old enough to claim a woman’s privileges, but too young to be held liable for a crime.”

“ Crime ? ” repeated Florence, bewildered as well as frightened.

“ Of course there can be no crime in an infant ! But—is it quite fair to expect me to remember at the same moment that she is too childish for responsibility, and not child enough for summary chastisement ? ”

Used to see not only the outward indulgence but the very symptoms and tones of his temper suppressed in her presence, Florence, in her helpless dismay, very nearly fell back upon the one resource that

would have instantly recalled the accustomed gentleness and consideration she now missed for the first time. Her eyes filled with tears, and it was with a great effort that she restrained them.

"I don't understand," she said, almost piteously. "What have I said? and what has Eugenie done? She must have been very naughty if you can——"

"So far forget myself in your presence? True, Florence. But you shall judge the case yourself, and be as hard on me as you think I deserve. Very naughty! Is that your word? Your sister had got my revolver. I told her sharply to put it down. She refused. She held it pointed at my breast with her finger on the trigger. I saw that my life hung on the steadiness of a hand shaking with excitement. There was not a moment to lose, and I fancy I threatened her. Then she fired."

"She has hit you! There is blood on your hand!" cried the girl, shuddering.

He involuntarily turned back his left sleeve, and saw the shirt crimson with blood, where the stream had trickled down unnoticed to the wrist.

"Happily the weapon was too heavy for her. The shot grazed my arm: it was aimed at my heart."

"Aimed? Oh Heaven, no! don't say such a dreadful thing! You might well be angry; she deserved any punishment . . . but you could not think she would murder you."

"She meant to *kill*," he answered, with recovered composure. "I would not call a passionate child's violence, murder; but don't be too hard on me if——"

At the words "she meant to kill," Florence's glance

had turned on the silent half-sullen, half-appalled culprit, expecting an impassioned denial. She read confession in the crimson cheeks, downcast eyes, and drooping form, and turned away in sickening horror. Still, when her eyes met those to which their wonted tenderness for herself had now returned, she could not realize the truth.

“Meant?” she faltered. “Oh no! you cannot think that! You don’t, or you would not have checked your anger; you would not have cared what I might feel, or——”

“What could I do—in your presence? You don’t suppose I could have acted so violently, when I had a moment to think? I said you should judge the case, and you shall; but don’t judge me as if I had acted deliberately.”

“*You!* If I seemed—remember, I knew nothing—how could I guess? And you had always been so gentle. . . . I am very sorry I came.”

“I am very glad, Florence, if I may hope that you can now excuse my intemperance. I trust I should have remembered myself in time, but it is as well you came to bring me to my senses.”

“I wish I had not; then you might have—but you would have forgiven her afterwards. Now—oh, what will you do? And oh! does any one know?”

“Who could, and what matters?” he answered, remembering enough of the slave code partially to understand her new alarm. “If *I* call it an accident, who can interfere? There is that consolation, at least, a—— she is amenable, practically, only to domestic jurisdiction. It is as well you missed,

Eugenie. Had you succeeded, you would have found harder measure than mine, and certainly not so gentle a judge as now."

Florence fairly started at the look and tone. The words addressed to Eugenie were ironical and even mocking, but there was nothing of bitterness in the sarcasm, and the mockery was almost kindly. In truth, his anger had been the mere physical outbreak of alarm and pain, and the bitterness of his first words was due to the mortification of being found in the wrong by Florence—a feeling which was more than appeased by her acknowledgment of injustice. Hardly able to believe in his returning good humour, she looked towards her sister, expecting to witness its effect on her; but, to her infinite surprise and pain, Eugenie stood untouched, unsubdued, impenitent.

"Stubborn, shameless!" thought Florence. "He cannot forgive; and what will become of her?"

The double thought, that the offender deserved no mercy, and that rejecting what was almost offered she would find none, was so legible in her face, that Lionel smiled as he answered the look which scarcely dared to be deprecating.

"Afraid *now*, Florence? Have I so utterly forfeited your confidence by once behaving ill under provocation? I ought, of course, to be used to bullets, as eels to skinning; but to be shot at by a child—the danger is so ridiculous, I confess it does put one out."

"Oh, don't!" she cried. "Don't make a jest of it! I ought to have known you must be right, but——"

"But I was *not*. Never mind; I told you you

should pass judgment yourself. Surely Eugenie is safe with you? ”

“Do you mean that, really? No . . . you cannot . . . and what can I say? She deserves the worst . . . I suppose. . . . But, whatever you do now, will you forgive her afterwards? No . . . of course you can't; and I ought not to ask it. You would keep your word, I know, but I have no right. . . . Of course you will send her away . . . you can't bear her near you again . . . but——”

Faltering and hesitating thus far with the plea she could not conscientiously utter, Florence's voice failed her.

“Do you think I am afraid?” he asked, fairly laughing. “She took me by surprise to-day, but in future I will keep my temper, even if she take better aim next time.”

“Don't!” implored Florence. “What could make her? She must have been mad.”

“Frantic with passion; as I was, next moment. I had spoken to her very roughly, and when her finger was on the trigger, I am afraid she thought I was going to strike her. I only meant to make her drop it at once; but it enraged her, and she fired instead.”

“She would have murdered you, because you scolded her for such wicked folly? It is too horrible to believe!”

“Why were you so obstinate, Eugenie? I don't ask why you fired; I understand that. But why would you not give it up when I bade you first?”

Too much agitated to think, too proud to plead for mercy while punishment impended, Eugenie was

softened by the tone of this question. Lionel's immediate submission to the check imposed by Florence's presence, his appeal to Florence's arbitration, forced her to feel the absurdity of her original apprehension; while she slowly realized the atrocity of her act in any case, the shameful ingratitude to their benefactor, and not least, the danger of utter ruin, of unspeakable misery, to which she had so nearly exposed her sisters. Whatever their master might have done, or might yet inflict, would be far less than she deserved; and it was not fear or anger on her own account that had prompted her fault or delayed her repentance.

"It was not that," she said at last, with a violent burst of tears. "But I—I would not let you ill-use Florence."

"Florence?" he repeated, in sheer bewilderment, scarcely remembering the summons that had brought the elder sister upon the scene, or its motive. But Florence's perception was keener and her memory quicker.

"More shame for you, Eugenie! What right had you to interfere, or I to rebel? Could you not leave him to deal with me as I deserve, to do what he thought right; could you forget what we owe to him? Did you care to think from what we have been saved, or what you were bringing upon us all? What can you or I expect, now that——"

"Nonsense, Eugenie! Don't scold her now, Florence," interposed Lionel, with all a man's susceptibility to girlish tears, all a man's impatience of feminine hardness to feminine distress. "Let her go now; she has had more than enough of a

lesson in the fright I gave her, and she shall not have the chance to play with six-shooters again. Come, Eugenie, child; whatever you feared or fancied for Florence, you can surely trust her alone with me now?"

He advanced to lead the child from the room, and was at first intensely surprised when she shrank from his touch, snatched her hand away, and covered her face.

"No, no!" she exclaimed, her voice half choked by passionate sobs. "Don't speak so kindly; don't laugh at my wickedness. I know—I cannot say—how very, very wicked I have been. Indeed, indeed, I had rather you would punish me as I deserve—whatever can be bad enough for me—than speak like this. You must hate me, of course:—and Florence will hate me too, now."

Her thoroughly sincere passion of shame and sorrow could find no adequate utterance; but it touched him profoundly. If a spark of resentment had still smouldered in his breast, her tears, her penitence, and above all the despairing earnestness of her last words, would have quenched it at once.

"Hate you, child? On the contrary, I shall love you all the better for your love to your sister; and you will understand by-and-by that you may trust me, even with a thing so precious as Florence. Now, give me a kiss, dear; and don't cry any more. Nay, Eugenie; we were both to blame; and I promise you you have heard the last of it."

The child shrank, abashed and remorseful, from the kiss of reconciliation, and her hand dared not return

the kindly pressure of that which led her from the room. But in both she felt the comfort they were meant to give, and the impulse, as well of genuine sympathy as of compassion and forgiveness, that prompted them. If she had never before comprehended him, if she had imperfectly appreciated alike her original obligation, and the considerate kindness and often-needed forbearance she had since received, Eugenie's thoroughly generous heart was won, at once and for ever, by a generosity she could understand and could hardly fail to exaggerate. Of the promised impunity indeed, she remained for a day or two half-incredulous, more certain that Florence had *not* forgiven her than that Lionel had: nor was the assurance, when it came, a source of unmixed satisfaction. She would have submitted willingly to any penance that, savouring of atonement, might have lightened her shame and self-reproach, without impairing to her spirit the fulness of the unexpected incredible pardon. What she dreaded, and felt that she had deserved, was the cold lasting displeasure that would not condescend to punish; that, if it had not deprived her of her home, would have made her an alien and an outlaw there, estranged from its master's kindness and from the frank, all-healing affection and ease that pervaded it. Against this Lionel's fraternal "kiss of peace" had warranted her; she felt in it more than she could believe—the seal of a full and frank "act of oblivion." For weeks, though it was hard to meet his look fairly and freely, she felt safer from reproach in his presence than when alone with her sisters—though even Florence dared not in words infringe his pledge that she

“had heard the last of it.” As day by day some look, word, act of natural and yet, it seemed, special and studied home-kindness reminded her *why* her temper was carefully spared, her sensibility peculiarly considered, the young girl learnt to feel for her guardian a strong, warm, cordial, but perfectly simple and domestic affection—affection as pure and frank as that of a child-sister for the brother who fills to her a father’s place; more close and earnest perhaps than that cherished by Rose and Eva for their protector, but yet more distinct from that which rendered Florence unconsciously timid, shy, and almost wayward with one who had loaded her with a weight of obligation that would have made most women—hate him.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE ROD.

“ So trust me not at all or all in all.”

CLOSING the door behind Eugenie, Lionel saw that Florence had sunk into the nearest seat, trembling in an agitation due probably even more to the scene through which she had passed than to that she apprehended. But, ascribing it wholly to the latter, he became more and more reluctant to speak, more and more uncertain how to begin.

“ You sent for me,” said Florence at last, finding it easier to plunge at once into what she most dreaded than to bear the suspense of silence. “ You had something to say to me ? ”

“ I would rather ask you,” he answered, “ whether you have nothing to tell me ; nothing it might be well that you should explain ? Don’t mistake me ; above all, don’t mistake the kind of right I pretend to ask for your confidence. You promised compliance with my advice ; and you may remember why I asked it. Is not this just the occasion on which my control may be your protection ? ”

“I remember—too well. You preferred a child’s obedience to a slave’s. You made me promise, that you might not have to compel. I wish I had never promised! Now, I have not only disobeyed but lied to you. I know the consequence, and must bear it. Call me to account as harshly as you will, I have nothing to say against it.”

The girl, scarcely conscious of the full meaning of her words, was wholly unconscious of the resentful tone which stung him to the heart. They were at cross purposes already. Florence was in a mood to remember only that she had to answer to unlimited power; Lionel equally sensible that the guardianship he could not choose but enforce rested on no moral or natural right. She was disposed to exaggerate her own error, and to see in his every word a step to merciless condemnation: he, most loth to wound her, almost as of course expecting her to rebel, and yet naturally taking symptoms of rebellion as presumptive evidence of a fault. Both were susceptible and nervous from the consciousness of a false position. Never did accused so sorely need that, in the old English phrase, the Court should be her counsel. Never was Court more favourably biassed; and never did defendant more wilfully throw away her advantage.

In most of us irritation is the instinctive reaction of self-reproach. Her youth and sex rendered this especially natural in her. Little could Lionel guess how, ever since her detection by Afzul, Florence had dwelt and brooded on the coming enquiry; how—fretting, thinking, probably crying over the matter for a

whole day and great part of the night, rehearsing in fancy and in dreams the dreaded interview—she had so magnified her fault and its natural consequences that, as hardly any view of her conduct seemed too harsh for the aspect it must wear to him, so hardly any penalty seemed improbable or undeserved. Seemingly at ease with him, he had no conception how her original superstition as to coming retribution had lingered in her mind; aggravated, and the details of fear and shame filled in, by Cassia's malignant suggestions. He had treated her and her sisters as ladies; but that, to her mind, was purely supererogatory kindness. If they should forfeit it by their own conduct, as she told herself that she had forfeited it, what could they expect but the treatment which, though an impossible outrage to ladies, would be only legitimate severity to slaves?

“Think for a moment, Florence. It must be hard to render account to me; but should I do well to forego explanation? Do you do wisely to refuse it?”

“Refuse? I never refused. Question me; if I don't answer, you will know what to do.”

“Shall I? . . . Florence, do spare me the pain of seeming to treat you as a culprit! . . . Well, if you will not tell me anything, I will tell you something. Riding out yesterday, I met a young acquaintance and spoke to him very sharply about trespassing.” He looked for the first time directly in her face as he spoke the last word, and was even more dismayed by the shame and confusion than pained by the distress it expressed. “He took it amiss. I met him again

this morning : he took worse aim than Eugenie's, and—he won't trespass again for some little time. Still silent, Florence ? Can you not supply the name I have not mentioned ? ”

Florence had shivered and looked up as the duel and its result were thus briefly told, but her glance instantly fell again.

“ I know,” she faltered, almost in a whisper. “ I have nothing to say for myself. I disobeyed you, though I did not mean to do it, at first ; and I have disobeyed you worse since.”

“ But why, Florence ? You must have far too much good sense and good taste not to know—— ”

“ That I was doing wrong ? ” she said, filling up from her own thought the sentence he found it difficult to conclude in accordance with his extreme anxiety not to wound her pride or offend her delicacy. “ I know—— ”

“ But, Florence, that was not what I meant. Where was the temptation, to such as you ? Of course he would say anything. Better men than he will lie shamelessly to women. But you might have known he could mean you and yours no good. If it had been any other girl—but you, who have suffered so much ; you so conscientious, so simply truthful—you cannot have been misled into what at best would be thoughtless coquetry ; you could not be carried away by mere reckless impulse. Will you not explain ? . . . Then ”—taking from his pocket the letter which Cassia had placed in his hand—“ is this really your writing ? ”

She scarcely glanced at the envelope, but her

deepening colour and evident trembling answered, even before her lips murmured, "Yes, Monseigneur."

"Take it, then. I think I can trust you now not to send that or any other. Could you think that it was safe, or that it was not a breach of your promise not to speak?—no, you are above such an evasion; but I thought you above all fal—concealment. Florence, will you not explain? If I distress you, do you think I do not feel yet more pain in seeing you troubled and ashamed? Do you think this is pleasant to me?"

The extreme bitterness of the tone, the vexation, the pain that her ear and heart could not mistake in his voice and manner, were more than she could endure in silence.

"I don't think so," she murmured. "You have trusted me and you have been deceived. You have been most kind, forbearing—and you are forced into severity. I know you hate it; but what can I say? I have deceived you; you cannot judge me too hardly; do what you please."

"That is childish, Florence. You are not a child, to be corrected or confined; and if you were, you are not my child. Will you not trust me; or if you will not speak, will you let me read that letter?"

"Why do you mock me with such a question? Of course you have read it."

"How dare you, Florence!"

They were the first words of anger he had ever addressed to her, and she looked up in sheer amazement.

"Your seal is unbroken. Do you think I would

have opened it in your absence? I will not open it now. Destroy it, or give it to me, as you choose."

Not of course ignorant of the conventional sacredness of letters, but used to strict paternal control over her correspondence, accustomed freely to interchange with Eva the letters each received—accepting her young guardian's authority much more implicitly than he, anxious to avoid its exercise, ever understood—it would never have occurred to Florence that, while compelled to action so decided and to an interference whose necessity she fully acknowledged, he could not endure, upon whatever suspicion or provocation, to read without her consent what it had been disobedience and deception to write.

"Forgive me," she said gently, opening the envelope and handing it to him. It seemed very carelessly fastened for such a letter, so easily did it yield to those trembling fingers. "Read it, Monseigneur, and then I will give you——"

She watched his face almost furtively as he glanced over the contents. He had taken the paper half-reluctantly, though with a manifest relief, an evident hope that his faith in Florence's purity and truthfulness—scarcely shaken by Afzul's report or Cassia's charges, or even by her own handwriting; which had yielded slowly and partially even to her own confession and the far more damning evidence of embarrassment and shame in her manner—would be presently restored and justified. A first rapid glance at the few blotted half-legible lines changed that expression to one of bewildered amazement, which deepened into wonder, incredulity, disgust, on a second and third

careful perusal. But all other feelings seemed merged in one of bitter, profound, unspeakable scorn, as—with a gesture not actually rude but indicating contempt as plainly as formal courtesy would permit—he rather flung the paper under her eyes than handed it to her, and turned as from an object too revolting to be willingly looked upon. And when, with difficulty, she obeyed his repeated injunction to read, her dismay and distress were too absolute for words, almost for coherent thought. Unfortunately he did not see her face, and therefore felt in her silence only natural shame and confusion.

“If,” he said at last, in the low deep tone of intense mental suffering, his voice hoarse and rough with suppressed passion—“if the least friend I knew on earth had told me this, I should have given him the lie, and shot him with less compunction than a mad dog. Miss Dupont, it was hardly worthy of you to reproach Eugenie for trying to remove the protection you thought an insult, the life that was only a barrier between you and—Dampierre.”

“How can you?” exclaimed Florence, stung to utterance by wounded affection and outraged delicacy. “You, who could not bear the thought of striking me, can lash me with such words as these! I am your slave; you have a right to punish me, to scourge me, as you please. But it is unmanly to insult me with such language as this.”

“Insult you, Mademoiselle!”

The words were spoken in a calmer tone, as his passion yielded somewhat to her indignant rebuke; yet to her sense they conveyed the thought that the hearer had fallen below the possibility of insult.

“Read your own words aloud. Ah, no wonder you falter! By God, you women are made of other flesh than ours! A man would find the knout less torture, the gallows less shame, than to read such words to one who never wronged you by word or look—no, not by a disloyal thought.”

She read, her voice giving neither emphasis nor even intelligent connection to the words:—

“I write in the hope to put an end to our state full of fear and harassing without further shame. If you will have my love, you must kill him. I had rather not. You know how dear I hold . . . you; but my hate for him will not fail. I will, I will be free from protection that so cruelly and meanly insults my fallen position.”

Of course Florence gave no effect to, what Lionel's more careful and perhaps less astounded eyes had seen without observing, the frequent blots and erasures, the very uneven and in some places scarcely legible writing. But she read mechanically, and hesitating here and there, as if memory in nowise assisted her to decipher her own characters.

“Well,” he said, as she stood silent and confounded, “I don't wonder. It must be hard to justify, even to your own heart, the assertion that the protection you have received from me has insulted you.”

“From you!” she cried, roused at last. “It is not!—There is nothing like that in it. How can you?”

He pointed indignantly to the lines which were still lying under her eyes. “You must have relied very absolutely on my patience, on my courtesy, Miss

Dupont, when you could venture to bid me read such a letter. It is well for Dampierre I could not open it before. His life was at my mercy, and had I read this—by God, *he* should have paid the forfeit ! ”

“ I *don't* understand,” the girl cried at last, breaking down utterly in a passionate flood of tears ; tears which for the first time in his life he witnessed, if not with unmoved composure, in perfect silence. Perhaps they somewhat relieved her bewilderment ; perhaps the pause of two or three minutes thus secured enabled her to think. At any rate, when with great difficulty she recovered her voice, she was able at last to attempt, if not defence, something like explanation or apology.

“ I know I have forfeited all your kindness, all the privileges you have allowed me. I cannot expect you now to treat me as other than a slave, and a slave who has deserved anything you choose to inflict. But do with me as you will ; don't think I am quite so bad. See, he—he wrote to me yesterday. The letter was given me ; I was going to destroy it : but I thought I would keep it to show you if you heard, as I felt sure you would, of the—the meeting ”—she shivered at the word—“ that I had never even opened it.” She drew a letter from her bosom as she spoke, but before looking at or handing it to him she went on : “ I cannot understand the other. I did not mean that. I—I *don't* understand. And here, see, I never—— ”

She paused, her eyes opening widely, staring at the envelope with a fixed frightened gaze, more hopeless if not more helpless than that with which

she had regarded her own writing, so recently forced upon her perusal. The letter was undoubtedly open. Florence was utterly overwhelmed by this crowning disaster. The double disappointment broke down her last hope of exculpation or excuse; intensified into sheer despair the dismay, distress and alarm which every incident of the scene, every occurrence of the last twenty-four hours, had tended to excite and increase. She could do or say nothing, now, to weaken the effect of the letter she had just been compelled to read aloud; and she felt keenly, in the midst of her confusion, what that effect must be. Such an exposure before one so kind, so generous, so loyal, would have shamed and terrified a less sensitive, less dependent creature. And Florence was not only a culprit, not only a dependent, but a slave. If she had never been allowed to feel this truth in her relations with him, she owed it solely to the considerate tenderness, the compassionate reverence, that she had so violently revolted. She had lost by her own fault the immunity she had enjoyed—had no more right to the privileges of sex and weakness than any other slave-girl. She had really—so she told herself—deserved disgrace; to him she must seem worthy of the severest and most degrading punishment that her situation and his authority entitled and empowered him to inflict. And in his language, tone, and countenance she read the ratification of her self-judgment—the confirmation of her worst fears. Untruly, of course; yet not unnaturally. The wall of observance and honour, of reserve and reverence, with which his own loyalty had fenced

round the defenceless loveliness placed by law and circumstance so absolutely at his disposal, had suddenly broken down. She felt herself at the moment, and for the first time, no longer absolutely safe in his hands; and interpreted by her own fears and experiences the change whose nature she could not conceive.

Another trivial incident assisted, perhaps, to define and enhance her terrors, by recalling the vivid picture of probable humiliation drawn in such cruel sharpness by Cassia's malignant fancy. She had sprung to her feet in her momentary outbreak of indignant resentment; now, as Lionel retained his seat, and she had fallen back into the attitude, moral and physical, of a conscious culprit, she stood before her master somewhat as the spiteful imagination of the confidential housekeeper had represented. Shame rather than fear kept her looks fixed on the ground; intense pain, bitter disappointment averted his from the humiliation of one he had honoured and trusted so thoroughly till that moment. She instinctively shrank from the plain direct words that would have forced him to understand the real meaning of her supplications; he never saw the quivering lips and trembling limbs that evinced her unaffected agony of terror—a terror he could not have borne for a single instant to look upon.

“I have nothing to say for myself, now—not a word. What would be the use? how could you believe me? I know what you will, you *must* do; and yet—the worst is what you must think of me. You cannot despise me more, you cannot be harder,

more disgusted, than I should be in your place. I should feel no pity ; I suppose I deserve none. And yet—but it is useless, you can't believe me. What can you do with a girl so lost—so shameless, so thankless—but punish her as a lying, treacherous slave ? I dare not beg for mercy ; you must scorn and laugh at me for pretending to shame—to delicacy, to womanly feeling—now. But—you—you have been kind so long, so kind to me above all—have you not some pity for me left ? You love—the children—still. . . . Deal with me as you will, yourself ; but—for their sakes—spare me what *they* would feel so keenly. You will not—you surely will not—disgrace me before others ? ”

“ Certainly not. Be open, be truthful at last, Florence ; and fear nothing.”

She was too utterly terrified to observe the tremulous wavering of voice that belied his coldness ; that might have assured her of the groundlessness of her alarms. These were too remote from his thought to be conveyed by her language ; the possibility of physical fear did not occur to him. He never guessed *what* she dreaded, what she intended to accept as due to her apparent if not to her real fault ; what aggravation of her sentence she so passionately deprecated. He had never dreamed how constantly the fact of slavery was present to her mind ; how, kept in trembling alarm by Cassia's cautious malice, she was daily reminded that every privilege, every exemption was granted and might be revoked by an irresponsible owner's arbitrary pleasure. In his actual presence, she had not till now been able to fear him ; but it

would have wounded him to the quick to know how often the voice and form that her waking consciousness could associate only with her security and happiness, were in the poor child's sleeping visions connected with sounds of terror, with scenes of misery and shame. On her part, Florence understood his words as conveying a conditional promise, and therefore implying an alternative menace. If she confessed her guilt in full, she need fear nothing; if she persisted in silence or denial, she might expect the worst—and that worst would at least involve the bitter servile indignity of personal chastisement. It was as well, perhaps, that, sorely tempted as she was, her native truthfulness, her conscientious and religious principles, were reinforced by her conscious inability to devise a plausible or even coherent fiction.

“You must do what you think right,” she faltered at last. “Whatever you choose to inflict, I can't complain; I know I must seem to deserve it all. But indeed, indeed I can't say what you must believe to be true; and if I speak the truth, you will be sure that I am lying. Don't tempt me; remember I am a girl, almost a child; and I am so utterly in your power. Pain and shame would make me say anything. Punish me as you will, with your own hand; strike as hard as you can bear to; but——”

He broke in upon her supplication with a cry of amazement, distress, and horror whose absolute sincerity, terrified and bewildered as she was, she could not but feel immediately and intuitively.

“Florence! What have I ever done, what have I said even now, that you should shame me by such

terrors? If I spoke roughly, rudely—was it strange? I thought I had won your confidence, and was stung to the heart to read what you wrote of me to another. But if you can fear such things, if you think me capable of them, no wonder you so long to be freed from me.”

“No, no! no indeed, Monseigneur!” cried Florence eagerly; deeply moved, and forgetting all else in her desire to repudiate the feelings ascribed to her, and soften the bitter pain evinced in the very tone of his remonstrance. “It was because you were so carefully, so anxiously kind and considerate that you must feel so hurt, so angry. And if . . . and I feared nothing worse than I might have done myself; nothing you have not a right to do, and reason for doing. What can I expect but the treatment of a slave who has worn out even such indulgence as yours? I could not think you harsh if——”

“Look into my eyes, Florence,” he interrupted; “and tell me, if you can, that you think such a thing the more possible because it is legal; that you feel less safe in my hands because I have the power, and what you call the right, to punish you as I please. It is because you have no security, no protection but my honour and your own helplessness, that I am ashamed to have spoken to you as I did.”

Touched by this appeal to her better judgment and truer instinct, Florence looked up as she was bidden; and, so looking into the eyes to which the almost remorseful horror and wondering self-reproach excited by her strange terrors had recalled a shadow of their habitual expression of reverent, loyal tender-

ness for herself, she could not but feel, at once and irresistibly, the utter futility of her fears. On his part, meeting that frank and once more trustful gaze, Lionel felt not less keenly the impossibility of believing her guilty of dishonour, of ungrateful falsehood, even of wilful and deliberate coquetry. He was the last man to mistake the stainless purity, the perfect honesty of the soul that looked into his from the depths of those clear, limpid, lustrous eyes. And as their glances met, unquailing and unashamed, there came into hers a new expression; a wistful, unconscious, almost hopeless appeal to *his* knowledge of the nature he ought to have understood too well to believe it, on any evidence, mean, disloyal, and thankless. He looked at her earnestly and long before shyness rather than timidity called a brighter colour to her cheek, and caused the drooping lids with their long soft fringe to veil the half-tearful eyes from his unspoken questioning. "Florence is true, or there is no truth in womanhood," was the result of his scrutiny. "If those looks can lie, I might as well disbelieve my senses as my instinct."

"I did not send for you to treat you as a culprit," he said, gently. "If I spoke roughly when I saw that letter, I spoke to a friend I had cause to reproach, not to a—a child accountable for her fault. I waive even such guardianship as you once voluntarily accepted; I claim no right to question, no confidence you cannot willingly give. But for your own sake, would it not be well to trust me frankly and fully—to tell me the whole truth?"

"Don't—pray don't speak so!" pleaded Florence,

earnestly. "I know you can't forgive me;—at least yet. But do not cast me off in that way; don't, because I have broken faith with you once, renounce the obedience I promised you. Don't tell me you will leave me to myself, when you have just seen how much I need to be controlled and warned. You were quite right to call me to account; and you spoke only too kindly and gently. Indeed, indeed I will try to tell you the truth—but—what is the use, now? With that letter before you, how can you believe a word I say?"

"Try to forget the letter, then, for the present. Tell your story in your own way, in your own words, and trust me not again to frighten or to wound you. Can you doubt that I shall be only too glad to forgive, if you have any error to own or to excuse; still more glad if it be I who have to ask your pardon for hasty and unjust suspicion? Not believe you? My one difficulty would be to doubt your word;—and remember, Florence, I did not doubt you on any evidence but your own."

"But," she said piteously, "how can you believe me any longer? But I will tell you, and you must—you must think I am deceiving you—you cannot help it. I heard that Sambo's child was sick; and you were out. I could not ask you, and I thought you would not be displeased that I went to her. It was wrong, perhaps; but I meant to have told you. Then I went on to the thicket at the end by the fence, where the flowers grow I have so often picked for you. I was gathering them, when Rupert, who had followed me, began to growl. I looked up, and saw . . . Mr. Dampierre. He spoke to me—I hardly know what,

I was so frightened and wanted to get away. He talked—don't ask me to repeat it—nonsense; but his face meant more than nonsense; and he took some flowers out of the basket. That roused me to run away, and I ran too fast to think; but I fancied I saw Afzul. I suppose he told you."

"Well," he answered, as she paused. "Go on; let me hear about the letters."

"This," she said, pointing to that which still lay open but unread by either on the table, "was given me yesterday. I did not—but it is no use telling you that."

"You did not open it, you mean?"

"But you see it is open. Then—I know I did very wrong indeed—but I did not know what to do. I was afraid to tell you, and I thought to end his annoyance and escape by threatening to tell you; and so I wrote to him, and gave the letter to——"

She stopped just in time. Willing to abide his sentence on herself, she would not betray another to his probable anger. But to Lionel nothing seemed more absolutely natural than this precaution.

"You gave it—to whom? You may tell me safely; I know, and I only wish to compare what you tell me with what I have heard already. Nay, don't be offended; I wish to sift this matter; not that I doubt you."

"Offended? doubt me?" she murmured, sadly. "How can you believe a word I say? You will keep your anger for me; you will not punish the servant who was used always to obey me?"

"Certainly not. You gave the letter, then, to Cora?"

Well, and why and what did you write? Now, Florence, pray answer frankly and exactly, though it must be painful to you."

"I wrote," she replied, for a moment forgetting the letter still lying under her hand, "that if he would not leave me alone I must tell you; and——" The paper, though not its contents, caught her eye; and she stopped again, blushing and trembling.

"Try to tell me," he said, very gently, "what you did write; and never mind this,"—taking the paper from her hands. "I can understand that you don't like to repeat all you said, and it pains me to press you. But I must have the whole truth, for your own sake."

"I think I said that I wished to end his hateful harassing with no more harm. That if he would not leave me alone I must tell you. I told him it would cost him dear—I did not want you to kill him. But I know I told him that if he persisted inform you I would; that his professions were only an insult in my present position."

While she spoke his eyes were fixed not upon her face, but on the fatal lines traced in her own handwriting, and acknowledged by herself. Observing this, she stopped; and, blushing painfully, with a colour that suffused her neck and face to the very roots of the hair, continued—

"I know—please don't question me any more—you can't possibly believe me. Say, do, as you think fit; I shall not think it unkind—I don't wish you to spare me when you cannot really forgive such—what seems such thankless insolence. But——"

“What do you mean?” he asked. “You forget that you have just given me an account of this letter in which there is no trace of ‘insolence,’—no trace, I mean, of anything that I could wish you had not written, except the letter itself. Why could you not trust me, Florence? Surely you know it would have been wisest to tell me at once, and leave it to me to deal with the difficulty?”

“But I dared not. I did not want him killed, bad as he was; and I was of course terribly afraid.”

“For me?” he asked, half smiling.

She paused, naturally tempted to avail herself of such a plea; but the instinct and habit of truth were scarcely less imperious with Florence, conscientious by training, religion, and native purity, than with him to whom chivalric honour made the name of a lie more hateful than death; and she answered truthfully, but with a hard and sustained effort.

“No, it was not that. I never thought to fear for you. I felt so sure. But—you had been very kind to me; I had no right to be afraid of you; but I knew I had done wrong to begin with. I thought you might be very, very angry; and——”

“Still, Florence, you might have trusted me. Surely, if I had so far forgotten myself as to speak harshly to you—did I ever do so till now?—it was better than to run the risk of corresponding with such a man; to say nothing of the probability of being found out.”

“You speak,” she answered, still with an evident struggle, “as if you were speaking to your sister; to some free English girl under your guardianship.

When the worst a girl fears, can have to fear, is to be scolded, or even locked up, no doubt she can speak the truth. And—I ought to have been true with you, whatever came of it—but . . . it is not the same thing when—if you had not believed me—there was nothing to prevent . . . you know what you might have done. Of course I have deserved it now; I have got myself into worse trouble; but . . . can you not understand?”

“Was that your real feeling, Florence? Could you still believe that, at the worst, however angry, however I might fancy you to blame, I *dare* treat you more harshly than a sister who had given me equal offence? Can you not see that, just because your legal position renders you so sensitive, I must feel that I owe you a more careful, watchful gentleness? Have you really lived all these weeks in the belief that your liability to—to personal indignities could ever be more than a name; can you have fancied your womanhood at the mercy of my temper? If it be so—Florence, I cannot tell you how this wounds me. We will let that drop. Now, will you, if you can—will you come here?”

The appeal conveyed in tone and gesture drew her at once close to his side, though she came with an evident lingering apprehension she could not perhaps herself have defined.

“Look over this letter with me, and tell me exactly what you did write.”

He took her hand and placed in it the pencil with which he himself had been tracing the written characters as she verbally explained her intention;

while he looked up as she leant on his chair with an expression in which, if she could not believe fully in the restored confidence it implied, she could at least read nothing but kindness. Thus encouraged, she ventured to look once more upon the lines in her own hand that had so distressed and alarmed her.

“ ‘ I write in the hope to put an end to——’ Is that ‘ our state ’ yours ? ”

“ I think—not,” she answered doubtfully. “ I think I wrote—no, I said nothing about ‘ state ’ or ‘ our.’ I told him to leave off his hateful, offensive harassing before harm came of it.”

“ ‘ Without further harm ’ or ‘ shame ’ ? ” continued Lionel. “ I understand : I fear I have done you cruel injustice, Florence.”

“ How can you say so ? ” the girl answered, still unable wholly to comprehend the purpose of his minute enquiries, nor yet catching a glimpse of the more than suspicion already formed, and almost established as a conclusion, in his mind. “ I know I have been wrong from first to last ; and you have not said a syllable I don’t deserve. You have scarcely spoken a word of reproach to me.”

“ More than *I* can forget,” he replied with a sigh. “ Will you read on ? ”

“ ‘ If you will have my love——’ ” She started with unmistakable frankness of shame and horror. “ I never, never could have written, have thought—I could not say such words to you ; to any one,” she added, checking herself. “ I told him to leave me alone.”

“ Ah ! there is a blank before the ‘ leave ’ which

has been turned into 'have.' Florence, some one imitates your hand wonderfully well. 'If you will *not* leave me alone'—it was, '*I* must;' and 'tell' has been altered into 'kill.' 'I had rather not; you know how dear——' Then this 'I hold.' "

" 'How dear it would cost you' I wrote," she cried. 'Cost' has a blot over it. I did not blot it that way; at least I don't think so. And 'my hate'—Monseigneur, could you think I so wrote of you? I wonder that, believing that, seeing it in my hand, you could spare me for a moment."

" 'At any rate,' " he puzzled out, " 'and for,'—those are your letters? "

" But there is a blot. 'At any rate inform him without fail I will,' " Florence said, recovering her self-possession as she began to realize the trick that had been played upon her.

" Ah! " he said, with a sigh half of relief, half of self-reproach, " now I see it all. And 'professions' has been turned into 'protection.' This, then, is what you really wrote? " and, taking the pencil, he rapidly scrawled beneath her signature the following words:—

" I write in the hope to put an end to your hateful, offensive harassing without further harm. If you will not leave me alone I must tell him. I had rather not; you know how dear it would cost you. At any rate inform him without fail I will. I will be free from professions that so cruelly and meanly insult my fallen position."

" That, or nearly that," she answered, after twice reading the lines.

“I see the whole now,” he cried, “except—yes,” examining the envelope. “This letter was ill-sealed. The bearer has opened and altered it.”

“Impossible!” said Florence. “Why should Cora wish to do me such a terrible injury? And she is not half clever enough; indeed, she can hardly write.”

“No, Florence. This letter has passed through another hand beside hers. I see it all. Can you ever forgive me for the rudeness of my words, when stung by what seemed so gross and wanton an unkindness—for fancying you capable of such a thing?”

“Forgive you? Could you help it? I have been very, very wrong; and if you had not been most kind, most patient, I should never have known the truth myself. I should have felt that I had forfeited the right to be believed; deserved—what you will not let me name. I ought never to have written; I ought to have told you at once; and I deserve all the sorrow and fright I have had.”

“A very heavy penalty for a very natural error,” he answered, sadly. “It is well something in your manner, and your look of bewilderment when I made you read out this letter, excited my doubt before—nay, Florence, before I might have said what you could hardly forget or forgive. The worst into which I could have been betrayed would have been words less harsh than you yourself applied to what you thought your conduct must appear to me.”

“What words could be half strong enough for it, if I could have acted and have written so? But could you believe it of me?”

“I ought not; and, Florence, I honestly think I

should have believed the letter a forgery, had I been able to open it before. But remember, when I saw it, you had just avouched it your own; and this ingenious altering might well mislead me, since for a while you doubted yourself whether it were yours or not."

"I began to think some evil spirit must have made me write the very opposite of what I intended. But who could be so wicked; who could try so hard to bring disgrace and punishment on me—to make you despise and hate me?"

"I could tell you, Florence, who has altered this letter, but I had rather not. . . . Yes, I will tell you; but you must not betray that you have been told;—only you must never trust her again, or suppose her to be a friend—till I can resolve how to deal with her."

"Who?" cried Florence in horror. "The servants cannot write. Oh, do not think that one of my sisters could have done this!"

"No, no; but one whose malignity to you seems utterly inexplicable. Why—I begin to believe now that, the first day I was here, it was by deliberate intention that you were kept in ignorance and terror so long. Florence, this forgery was Cassia's work."

"Ah!" cried Florence, after a full minute's pause. "And she did say such cruel things; did say all that could terrify and torture me, before I came to you that evening. I thought she was warning and pitying me; perhaps she was. It seems so strange; she must be going out of her mind. I never did anything unkind to her."

“I have to thank Cassia, then, for your wild imaginings that day? She told you what you had to fear? Well, it was foolish enough on your part: on hers it must have been deliberate invention, merely to make you suffer in imagination—what no doubt she would have liked you to suffer in fact.”

CHAPTER III.

SUNSHINE BEFORE THE STORM.

“Years of his youth, how rapidly ye fled
In that beloved solitude.”

“FLORENCE, I should like to ask you one question, if I may be sure not to offend or pain you. Have you altogether and for ever forgotten, thrown away, the fears with which you so long tortured yourself and wronged me;—the idea that your legal position could possibly mean in my hands anything worse or more than—it has meant as yet?”

It was late in the Summer, a season when, in Louisiana, laziness has charms, exertion *désagréments*, even for those who keep up as anxiously and conscientiously as did the ex-soldier European habits of activity, and aristocratic love of hardier sports than Southern and Western Europe afford; and the speaker lay at length under the shade of the great cedar mentioned in a previous chapter, at the feet of the Creole maiden he addressed; who—seated in a light garden chair, her fingers somewhat irregularly occupied with a piece of the embroidery of the day, sarcastically described as cutting holes to sew them up again—raised her eyes from time to time to watch

the occupation of her sisters. These found the heat far too oppressive for those active gambols with Rupert in which we saw them engaged, in the same place and under not dissimilar circumstances, earlier in the year, but were still amusing themselves with the great mastiff; Rose and Eugenie weaving a broad bright collar of flowers for his thick shaggy neck, and Eva, laughing over the incongruity which gave zest to this childish amusement, now and then patting her favourite to keep him quiet under the frequent and somewhat teasing manœuvres of the children. But no other interest, no occupation, though much more absorbing than those which now engaged her hands and eyes, could ever render Florence inattentive for a moment to the voice that had just addressed her, or detain her looks elsewhere when fair and sufficient cause was given to turn them on the eyes now earnestly looking up into her own.

“You mean,” she answered, with a half-smile, and an increase of colour so slight as to him, who understood his own feeling and hers, almost to answer his question—“you mean—am I still afraid that under any provocation you could persuade yourself to . . . why, you can’t bear the very word! No. If you could not make up your mind to deal in that way with Cassia, no slave could possibly forfeit, in your eyes, the privileges of a woman. And,” she added in a lower and softer tone, “whatever you could bear to inflict, Monseigneur, I think any of us might be content to suffer. Yours would be the sharper pain.”

“You do believe that, at last? But I was not thinking only, or directly, of such gross and impos-

sible abuses of your legal subjection, but rather of the subjection itself. I find myself obliged to confess, Florence, that I have not done my duty, have not behaved well to you ; and I can hardly hope for your pardon if your sense of wrong be still as keen as at first. You must have been anxious, the more perhaps because you never spoke on the subject, that the necessary measures to redress that wrong should be carried out ; and you must have thought me strangely negligent if not wilfully slow."

What meant her now rapidly brightening colour ? the strange half-wistful, half-ashamed expression of her dark eyes, that were not turned from him but would not meet his own ? Was it pain at the recollection thus recalled to her, pain in the humiliation she had felt so keenly at first and never wholly forgotten ? Was it a reproach she would not put into words, and would not willingly express even by look ? Some such meaning it must bear for him. Had her mother been alive and present, she might have put another interpretation on the changing complexion, and the kind of shrinking from some more or less unwelcome thought—a shrinking of which the girl was half unconscious, half ashamed—which maternal quickness of observation might have discerned in the eyes and attitude.

"I have not behaved quite so ill as it may seem," he went on, "and yet I must not excuse myself untruthfully. I am afraid I have not been so eager or earnest as I ought, from the moment I knew that you were safe ; safe at any rate from every one but myself. In truth, Florence, I have been happy here ;

happy in a kind of home to which I had no right, but which you and your sisters have made scarcely less dear and pleasant to me than was that I have forfeited for ever in England, while my father and sister were with me. And, knowing that any other home is denied me by the same circumstances that drove me into exile, I have been selfishly loth to break up this."

Her eyes had drooped, her face was almost turned from his at this confession; but he was too conscious of the error he confessed to look at her just now, and he received her low murmur, "I am glad; it is kind of you to say so, to feel so," simply as a kindly tribute to his own penitence, prompted by a mere impulse of consideration for him, and nowise as implying the slightest personal sympathy with his clinging to the actual state of things.

"Colonel Marion," he went on, "spoke to me some months ago—you remember, perhaps, his first visit here? He suggested that you should be emancipated by a private Act of the Legislature, and gave reasons why that course should be taken."

"But," interrupted Florence, with some embarrassment, and yet with a certain eagerness, "what right had he? He did not attempt to help us at our need. Surely it was strange for him to interfere with your dealing with your own?"

"He thought, rightly, Florence, that your case was a disgrace to the State, and that full justice could best be done by a measure which would seem like a confession and reparation of injustice by the State. Of course they could not take away my property

without what the law calls compensation; they proposed—not to make up to me the loss of my interest in you, nothing could do that, but—to pay me the supposed money value of possessions so precious.”

“Compensate?” Florence exclaimed. “As if we had been of any use or value to you; as if you had treated us—— Compensate!—That sounds more like insult than justice! Compensate you in money for relieving you of an anxious charge; pay you to take from you the care of those you have cared for like sisters! They were not so tender to us before;—and, but for you, how ever would they have compensated *us*? What would have been left to emancipate? what redress could they have given?”

She paused, not aware even when her words were spoken of the full meaning of the ideas they conveyed—uttered as they were under the impulse of gratitude and indignation, rather than as the expression of distinctly realized reflections—but conscious that they meant more than she would have cared to say.

“True, Florence; but the Providence that sent me here in time had made it possible to give you some measure of redress; and it speaks well for Colonel Marion that he was anxious to do it. But they did not propose to do it without my assent; indeed they knew they could not, and it was my assent he came here to ask.”

“And you gave it?” she enquired, still avoiding to look him in the face. “You agreed to sell our freedom for money, as if——”

“Florence, you hardly mean what you are saying. You know that no price would induce me to part with

you, if I had a right to refuse; you can hardly think that the compensation was a matter of any interest to me. I could not but wish that justice should be done you, but there was so much doubt about their success that I did not tell you; and as you never reproached me, as you never expressed the anxiety you must have felt, I put off explanation from day to day. I fear you have thought me very cruel to trifle with what must have been your chief anxiety, your principal thought."

"Indeed no!" cried Florence eagerly. "I had no right—and, after all, why should I think of it? I don't think you understand. To be a slave was unspeakable humiliation. But having been a slave, I could not get rid of that by having my freedom purchased and given me again. I should still be a slave by birth, still belong to a class lower than the lowest freeborn people; and having been *your* slaves, it would have been ungrateful indeed for all your kindness had we been so untrustfully impatient to escape from the yoke we have never been allowed to feel. Besides, I think I told you, for my sisters, I was so glad to remember that, as they had no other friend in the world, as their only relation was so selfish, so heartless—as it would have been the worst misfortune to them to fall under his charge—I was glad to think they had a right to your care, though it was only the right of slaves. You have taught us to feel what my father so often said, and we used to believe:—that for those who cannot protect themselves, slavery, which gives them a legal right to protection and help, may be better than freedom which leaves them friendless to

do the best they can for themselves, in the midst of a world that will do its worst for them."

He was surprised, and perhaps a little perplexed, by what nevertheless seemed to him no more than exaggerated gratitude and consideration. The one element in Florence's thought which would probably have been common to other Southern girls in a similar position was hardly intelligible to one who, brought up in a land where slavery and its traditions are forgotten, had seen it too recently and too completely from without to realize the ideas of a slaveholding community. That slavery itself, however lightly enforced, was an intolerable degradation to those who had been born or at least brought up in freedom, seemed to him a natural and necessary idea. That to have been a slave inflicted an indelible stigma—that an even deeper stigma lay in that fact of race admixture which had reduced them to slavery—was novel and almost unintelligible. Nor could he now realize the state of feeling natural to one brought up among such institutions and ideas; any more than he suspected the sentiment, never yet acknowledged or realized in her own breast, which, now that emancipation was brought for the first time to her thought as an immediate probability, made it more painful than pleasant to Florence.

"I am afraid you will be bitterly disappointed, nevertheless," he replied, after a brief pause, "when I tell you that Colonel Marion has written me that, in the present state of public feeling, a private Act of Emancipation is simply hopeless."

The maiden's heart beat fast, throbbed with a feeling she could not, perhaps would not, understand, but which certainly was not wholly a feeling of pain. She had not been allowed to feel the shadow of alarm respecting the fitness or rectitude of the situation, strange as it was. As has been already said, the tone of Southern society, the stringent character of the protection its thought and usages afforded to maiden honour, had given an unconscious ease and security which girls accustomed to the vigilant guardianship of Europe would not have enjoyed. Slavery did away with this, as with all protection; and the very idea of slavery had inspired Florence with a terror not less intense because it was indefinite. But the greater that terror, the more naturally the sisters felt only relief, comfort, safety in the fate that had given them into friendly hands. From the fears which absolute subjection even to his will might have excited, Lionel's quiet, tacit, but complete abnegation of the tone and claims of ownership had effectually screened them. On the other hand, slavery had rendered their retention in the home which had passed along with themselves into their master's possession natural and inevitable. He had taken care to surround them from the first with a delicate considerate reserve and courtesy, which precluded the occurrence of any incident that might have startled into consciousness the instincts of maiden innocence. They had never known how a master's power could be abused; and nothing could suggest it while, slaves in law, they were treated in fact as free, as wards entitled to honourable observance and scrupulous respect.

Lionel's frank, affectionate, fraternal kindness to the younger sisters, softened by an especial deference, a reverential tenderness towards the eldest, removed from the necessary reserves of their life any sense of constraint that could have made Florence ask herself why constraint was required. Even her panic fears had resulted in enhanced confidence, by bringing naturally to light the depth of his personal reverence for herself, to which the very thought of servile indignities inflicted on her was an intolerable outrage. She was too perfectly, absolutely secure consciously to tell herself that she was safe with him; too happily at rest in present relief from the prolonged terror and torture of the past, to have asked herself as yet what the future was to bring. The first idea or rather feeling suggested by the approach of freedom regarded, of course, the loss of their present home and guardianship; and there was enough that was necessarily painful and alarming in this to conceal from the girl's own conscience the keener and more bitter pain with which she anticipated the personal separation that would follow.

"You have not," he went on, "taken much interest in politics, I suppose. You have not heard much from me. Indeed, till lately I saw no reason to trouble myself about the political affairs of a country with which I have but so very recent and imperfect an acquaintance. But of late the excitement has been too universal and too violent to allow me to remain careless of its meaning; and when once I began to enquire what it meant, the prospect was too grave to let any one whose interests are in any way concerned

here neglect the political situation. Abolitionism, which had seemed to me at a distance a mere theoretical question, appears to have become now a pressing danger. So far as I can see, so far as I can learn from what seems to be the universal opinion here, the Presidential election of this Autumn is to be fought out, not indeed on the direct issue of slavery or emancipation throughout the States, but on a question of sectional hostility between North and South, of which, whether the North mean it or not, this must be the outcome. I can read in your face, Florence, that still your sympathies go with your section; you feel still as a Louisianian, and you will not blame me if it should be my fate to fight for the laws that have done you such bitter wrong. Well; but this is the point, this is the way in which this excitement bears on you. On the subject of slavery and everything touching the slave code, the feeling here and throughout the Gulf States is so passionate, so sensitive, that it is dangerous to touch it; and there is no more chance of carrying a measure of justice, even to an individual victim of that code, at this moment, than there would be of passing a grant to Roman Catholic schools in England in the midst of a furious No-Popery agitation. So I find that in postponing all other steps, all endeavours to emancipate you and your sisters by my own act, and relying on Colonel's Marion's plan, I have made it impossible to restore your legal freedom, at least for months to come. I know I am to blame; but don't think too hardly of me. It was not that I would have consciously, willingly have neglected anything I knew to be necessary towards your freedom;

but, knowing you safe after my death, I was not so eager to part with you as I ought to have been."

"I could not understand that," Florence said, in a low faltering tone that rapidly gained force and firmness, "if you had not taken such anxious thought and pains for our happiness that your success—the sight of those whom you found in such misery and have rendered so happy—must have been a pleasure to yourself. If you do care for us, if you like to see us about you, it can only be because you have been so kind to us. What right have we to wish you to give up what you bought so dear? You have as full a right to us as ever owner had to slaves; and while you choose to retain us—don't think us so ungrateful as to complain that you are slow to send us out into the world. I won't say I have never thought about it; but I have thought less and less of late; and for my sisters, they don't think at all. If it were not for a look or a sneer now and then, that may after all be my own imagination, perhaps a perter answer to Eugenie's temper, perhaps a little more neglect of Eva's fancies, there would be nothing to remind us; and I don't think they ever do remember. At least, Eva tells me everything she feels or thinks—she cannot keep a thought to herself even when she had better, and we have never had a secret from one another; and Eva—well, she has once or twice remembered, but it has only been when she must ask you something, or must not venture to one or two places she used to go to; and the others—Eugenie threw it at you once in a passion that she was a slave; but it hurt you a thousand times more than

her, and I am sure she has never thought of it again."

"I know," he replied, somewhat relieved. "The two are such children; and Eva is too light-hearted to think gravely of anything. I should hardly perhaps reproach myself as I ought for neglecting what is due to them. What I can't forget is that I have been too slack, too careless in relieving *you* of a burden which, if it is but nominal, you have shown that you feel so bitterly."

"I was very foolish and very wilful," Florence answered, frankly. "And, as you know, that woman had frightened me; and I never had the sense, the openness to tell you how, or you would have made me feel as safe at first as I do now. And I don't think you quite understood my fears"—she hesitated and coloured—"and I am afraid I can't explain. Some kind of fear there is that seems to haunt my dreams still. I never know what it is exactly: something much worse than any possible severity from you would seem, now. But whatever it is, I always think—look to you to save me."

Was the shade that had come over her face due to the rapid overclouding of the summer sky with the threatening of a thunderstorm? He was about to reply, fearing that the dreams of which she spoke had left a more than merely fanciful impression on Florence's sensitive and somewhat superstitious spirit; but the falling of three or four heavy drops recalled both their thoughts to a more practical if yet more trivial alarm.

"Eva! Rose!" he called out hurriedly to the

children. "Come, Florence, you must not risk a soaking even for a few minutes."

They had scarce a hundred yards to go, and he hurried her onward when she would have paused, to wait for the sisters for whom she always manifested a half-maternal care and sense of responsibility. But before they reached the house her light white dress, still bearing traces of mourning in the black sash and ribbons, was drenched through; and he anxiously bade her change her own clothing and leave the others to the care and assistance of Cora, who had now taken Cassia's place as their immediate personal attendant. Half an hour later they had all re-assembled in the gallery, where, when confined to the house during the day, the younger girls were wont to amuse themselves with romps or more regular play. It was characteristic of the ease and innocent intimacy very gradually established between them, that Florence had seated herself almost as matter of course in the embrasure nearest to the study, where Lionel leaned against the wall; equally characteristic of the deferential courtesy that never disappeared from his manner that, as he took from his tunic the cigar case which had been thrust inside to escape the shower, he turned to her with something more than a merely formal appeal for her permission.

"This storm has cut off the pleasure I had promised myself in one of these, the last I got from Cuba and have not tasted yet; and if I may not smoke here, I shall not know till evening what they are good for. No; you don't suppose I am going to shut myself up alone for that indulgence?"

“How you men *do* care for tobacco!” Florence answered, laughing. “I wonder what the charm can be? You are better in that way than almost any one I knew; and yet I believe you would be less vexed to lose your breakfast than your cigar afterwards.”

“Perhaps,” he said. “I tried hard to give it up altogether, after it had been forbidden me on ship-board for many weeks. But the temptation was too strong, the minute I came among men, away from home, again.”

“Why should you?” asked Florence, with evident interest.

“Because it seems at best a selfish and somewhat unmannerly indulgence. One can hardly justify to one’s self, as thoroughly courteous and respectful, smoking in a lady’s presence; and if we don’t yield so far as that, we do what is worse.”

“Indeed,” she answered, laughing again, “I think even of you we should see less than we do, were you to insist on that scruple. . . . See, Monseigneur!” she said, suddenly changing her tone for one of some embarrassment and dismay, “are not they”—pointing to two figures on horseback that had just crossed the bridge—“coming here?”

“Yes; they will want to take shelter. You shall not run away this time,” he said, laying his hand gently on her arm, and detaining her with a decision against which she could not rebel. “Those who ask our hospitality must take it on our own terms; and, thank Heaven, this is not England,” he added, aside. “Men soon learn courtesy among a people who never fail to resent an affront, and even women’s insolence

is curbed by knowing that it must be answered, not by themselves but by others.—No, Florence, you shall not go! I think I know the man, too. Yes, it is General Vane—Sir Philip now. And the lady seems English, and much younger. I heard, I fancy, that he was married. Florence, will you and Eva take her to your own room? If they stay, you will tell Cora, I suppose, to give them the rooms above my own.”

He drew the girl's hand within his arm as he spoke, and released it only when, opening the front door, he stepped forward to assist the stranger to dismount before turning to greet his former chief, now promoted to the rank of Major-General and honoured with the second rank in the knighthood of the Bath. Consigning the lady directly and formally to the care of Florence, who obeyed with manifest reluctance and shyness, and of Eva, whose simple fearless frankness made amends for her sister's silent shrinking reserve, he led the General to his own chamber, opening out of his study, before more than the hastiest greeting had passed between them.

“Have you made a home here, Darcy?” said the latter, presently.

“Did you not hear me name Mademoiselle Dupont to her who, I suppose, is Lady Vane? Don't you remember her with her father in India? Or have you heard nothing of her terrible story? I need hardly tell you, Sir Philip,” he added, looking gravely and almost sternly into the face of his old commander, “what the introduction itself implied and avouched?”

“You need not,” replied Sir Philip. “I know you,

and I know your pride alone would keep you clear of all errors but those for which, as you would say, you can answer with your sword. Moreover, I think I heard in New Orleans something of the story your little household recalls ; and if so, Louisa—Lady Vane—as well as myself must feel for them all the respect that the most cruel of undeserved misfortunes can command. But how is it that every one at home is in profoundest ignorance of your whereabouts ? Except through your agents, Lord Penrith could not even ascertain that you were living. They could only tell him that you had drawn on them through correspondents in New York and New Orleans within the last six months.”

“ I received one brief note from him, in reply to my own on a single important question, before leaving Europe. After that, I wrote to him once, to Amy, under cover to him, twice ; and receiving no answer assumed that circumstances, of which you may or may not have heard, had rendered him unwilling that she should reply. I acknowledge his right to drop my acquaintance : I thought it somewhat hard that my only sister should be compelled to do the same.”

“ I am sure,” replied Vane, “ that there has been no such compulsion ; very nearly sure that your last letter at least has never reached their hands.”

“ Strange,” musingly observed the other ; “ but more likely perhaps than that Amy should willingly, for whatever cause, have so treated me. Well, I am glad of your coming on all accounts ; and on this especially, that I can give to you, if you are likely to

return to Europe soon, a packet for her which I did not choose to trust to the post—certain relics of our mother and traces of her early history, which were among the papers left to my charge by Sir Francis Clavering. Of course you will ask Lord Penrith's leave to do so, before putting them in her hands."

"I can assure you," rejoined Vane, "that your punctilio is as unfounded as it seems extravagant. Lord Penrith is the last man to play the tyrant to his wife; and were it otherwise, he has spoken only with kindness of yourself. I thought you had given grave offence in another quarter; but only such offence as would disappear in the first half-hour's interview. . . . I forgot, though——"

"You forgot the law that will neither defend a gentleman's honour nor allow him to avenge it," returned Lionel bitterly. "Well, I have no more wish than power to return to England. I have renounced the name of Englishman for ever, and often wish I could relieve myself of the one remnant of English feeling that has excluded me from every service where I might have to draw my sword against her or France. It has shut me out from the only career for which I was fitted—a career which, if I were not enthusiastic about it whilst I was a soldier, I have never ceased to pine for since I was compelled to quit it."

"If one might trust Louisianian talk," said the other—"it is wild and fierce enough, but the fierceness is so universal as to be likely to realize its own wild suggestions—you might have your fill of fighting here before very long."

"Very likely. I was popular enough with my

neighbours till I spoke my mind somewhat rashly on that point. It seems to me most probable that, if Lincoln is elected, this and half a dozen other States at any rate will secede. They have talked so loud and so hotly that mere consistency, mere dread of seeming ridiculous, would force less high-spirited men to give effect to their threats. And yet half of them really believe that because they can secede legally—of which I have no doubt, since it seems that Virginia at least reserved from the first the right to do so—they will be allowed to secede peaceably. I put to Colonel Marion, one of the most sober among them, the other day an argument which seems to me unanswerable. The North agreed, before emigration had well established itself in the North-West, while the North meant little more than the States between the Alleghanies and the sea, to purchase this territory, despite a good deal of fierce party and sectional opposition. Now, when half the North lies West of the Alleghanies, when the balance of power is held by States all whose rivers fall into the Mississippi, of which New Orleans is the natural emporium and outlet, would any law whatever, any obligation, any oaths, any principle of consistency (and I grant they are bound by all these) induce them to let us go peaceably—to allow the lower half of this great river to be held by an independent, a jealous, and probably a hostile Power? The thing seems to me sheer absurdity. If we mean to secede in earnest, we shall have to fight; and if we have to fight—well, the Northerners have given some reason for the taunts heaped upon them; but if there be any English blood in them, if

they be not utterly degenerate, it ought to be a very serious thing indeed for six millions to fight twenty-two, with all Europe open to them, with every resource closed to us; without powder, without guns, without clothing, without the means of manufacturing, without a ship; against a Power that ought to be—that can be if it pleases—second only to England on the sea, and at any rate thrice as strong as we are on land. It is not for me to meddle—till it comes to that. Happily I should not be ruined if I lost this estate, and the slaves who form the most valuable part of the property. But of two things I feel sure. This State, next to the Border States that may join us, will be the first and the greatest sufferer; and secondly, however the war goes, it will be fatal to the institution which, after all, is at the bottom of the whole matter. I despise the English cant about slavery; I am heartily willing to fight for it if need be. But, it seems to me, the last charge to which my neighbours, as rational men, should be open is the charge of fighting for slavery; since the one thing certain is that slavery can hardly outlast civil war, end how it may.”

“You think they will fight, then?”

“You mean, I suppose, do I think they will secede? I think so, I am not quite sure. Butler, Ballard and others, splitting up the Democratic majority, have made Lincoln’s election almost certain; and that the South will hardly stand. But that if they secede they will fight, and fight as hard as any people ever fought for life, for honour, for independence,—of that I know them too well to doubt for a moment.”

“You talk,” said Vane, “as if you were heart and soul a Louisianian yourself.”

“Louisianian, no; Southerner, yes! This is the one country peopled by the Anglo-Saxon race whose habit of thought, whose institutions, the character of whose society are endurable. The South is the only country in which I could live without constantly fretting at some point against the curb, without cursing every day the laws under which I must live; and it is worth fighting for the home I have chosen. At any rate, the man who would not fight for it must be a cur.”

“And yet,” observed Vane, “not for yourself but for others, you must fret, I think, against some of the results of Southern law?”

“I don’t know. In India I learned to look on Mademoiselle Dupont and her sister as friends and equals. Therefore to find them here cast down into slavery was horrible, to treat them as slaves impossible. But, after all, their position resulted from an evasion of the law; had their father observed it the case could never have arisen. And my feeling for them is a mere accident of personal sympathy; I don’t know that it affects my view of slavery in general.”

CHAPTER IV.

“FLORENCE—IT IS WAR.”

“The shadowy hosts are closing on the plain :

Now, God and Santiago strike, for the good cause of Spain !”

FLORENCE sat alone in her *boudoir*, musing over the possible consequences to her own life, and those in whom that life was bound up, involved in the critical fortunes of her country, rather than on those fortunes themselves. In the latter, however, she took an intelligent and eager interest, much more reasonable and reasoning, as well as founded on a much fuller knowledge of facts, than in the most exciting political crises English girls commonly acquire or display. Finding by her questions, and her profound attention to his replies, that she was fully capable of appreciating at any rate the general outline of the questions at issue, and felt not as one whom Abolition might emancipate from a degrading and perilous position but as the daughter of a Southern gentleman, Lionel had taken care for some time past to furnish her with the newspapers that eagerly discussed day by day the varying probabilities of the political situation. She had learned the fatal disruption of the great Democratic majority, the consequent election of the repre-

sentative of Northern aggression by a minority of two to three, in which minority was scarcely one Southern vote; the secession of the seven Gulf States; their threatened coercion in despite of Constitutional views a year before yet more fiercely upheld by the North than by the South. Now, the vital question concerned the probable action of Virginia and the other Border States, whose institutions and convictions bound them to their Southern sisters, while policy and practical interest rendered them averse to the precipitate course pursued by the latter. Closely interwoven with both her personal and patriotic feelings, emblematic as it were of both and of their intimate connection, was the work that covered the table behind her; half folded, partly concealed too by the skeins of silken and silver thread that were loosely heaped upon it, but displaying plainly enough to any one acquainted with them the colours of the flag then adopted by the South—the crimson field crossed by a broad belt of white, while occupying the place of the Union Jack on our naval ensign, nearest the staff, was the blue canton with the seven silver *mullets* arranged as a wreath or crown—the Stars and Bars of the original Confederacy. On these colours Florence and her sisters had been employed for some two or three weeks, and their work, which her nervous eagerness had lately hurried, was all but complete.

The young maiden's musings were frequently interrupted, as she raised her head to listen for sounds outside, and not hearing the hoof-beat for which she was waiting, wondered somewhat uneasily what could detain her guardian so long after the April twilight

of that climate had faded into almost utter darkness. He had refused to take any part in political discussion so long as Secession was yet an open question, beyond the frank expression of the military views he had briefly explained to General Vane. But from the moment when Secession was an accomplished fact, he had thrown himself heartily and eagerly into the counsels of those who understood the full gravity of the policy to which they stood committed; had placed his professional experience and his personal services absolutely at the disposal of the authorities, and was constantly engaged in assisting the organization and drilling of the volunteers who had the sense and spirit to prepare themselves to defend their State, in an emergency which none could deny to be at least possible. But at present his duties lay near home, and this evening he had expected to return early. Florence had insisted on the retirement of her younger sisters after the supper, long postponed in hope of his return, had been eaten in comparative dulness and silence; and now loitered alone in her dressing-gown, her long dark hair unbound, combed out to its full extent and veiling her form, as its ends concealed the seat of her chair; not expecting to see him, but unwilling, perhaps unable, to sleep without hearing his return.

“Florence,” said Eva’s voice through the open door of their chamber, “do come to bed now. I dare say he won’t come in to-night, and if he does he won’t like you to go to him.”

“Of course not, Eva; but I think he will come in, and I want to be sure whether he has. Surely that

was a horse's tramp on the bridge? Yes; and that is a horse at gallop. It is very fast:—oh, I hope nothing has happened!”

She was hardly reassured when the animal stopped, its pace checked with unwonted suddenness, at the front door. It was only when this opened, and she heard the well-known step in the gallery, that her hastily conceived fears were relieved. She half rose, as if forgetful of the impossibility that she should personally welcome her friend at that hour and in that attire; and sudden self-recollection probably contributed to her nervous start as the familiar foot-step, instead of turning towards the study, approached her own chamber, and she heard the gentle tap at the door which occasionally, but never before at such an hour, had asked admission to the apartments she shared with her sister.

“Come in,” she cried quickly; as quickly closing with a backward movement of her hand, but without rising, the door of her sleeping-room. He hesitated, on seeing how unseasonably he had intruded; but, instantly aware that his retreat would now mark his sense of indiscretion, and deepen any embarrassment or annoyance that Florence might feel, he came forward at once and took her hand as usual.

“I would not have come here so late, of course, if I had not something to say which you would hardly forgive me for putting off till morning. Florence—it is War!”

“How?” she asked eagerly. “Have they declared it? Or has there been bloodshed? And where, and how?”

“You remember, our Commissioners sent word that Seward had pledged himself and their President that there should be no attempt to relieve Sumter? Under cover of that promise they have sent a fleet, which tried to force its way into the harbour, evidently intending to surprise Charleston. Of course Beauregard had no choice. The heavy shore guns kept off the fleet, and Sumter could do nothing. Anderson has hauled down his flag.”

Florence clasped her hands and sprang to her feet in eager delight; then, looking in his face, felt surprised and half rebuked by its expression of grave regret or dissatisfaction.

“You look displeased,” she said timidly. “What is it? Is there anything wrong? Has anything else happened?”

“No, my dear child,” he answered with a sigh, speaking with less thought of his words under the influence of deeper feeling than usual. “You don’t know all that this means. Lie as they may and will, of course the real attack came from their side, and a very treacherous one it was! But we have fired on their flag, and that—that decides everything.”

“It is war, as you said, of course. But surely we need not flinch from war? Surely our people can hold their own?”

“One to four, Florence; with nothing but bread, and with four millions of slaves? . . . The Border States will be with us now, of course. But *they* have the ships, the money, the guns, clothing, medicine, everything. All your Southern pride of race, your

trust in superior moral quality, superior martial spirit, are very fine, very inspiring, when war has to be fought out; very well in songs; very useful, no doubt, to encourage women who are frightened, or induce soldiers to confront odds in a position that must be held. But they are the veriest folly when they enter into the calculations or influence the conduct of statesmen or communities, while they have yet to choose between war and peace. You were hardly pleased with me for leaving you for a whole month on a Northward journey, in which you could see neither purpose nor necessity. But as a soldier I wished to see, to judge. Florence, I have seen war; and though it was on a small scale, though my experience was brief, no man who has seen war looks upon it as women and boys and an ignorant democracy do. I think more meanly of the Yankees than I did; but even the Yankees will fight now; and they have hundreds of thousands of Germans and Irishmen who will make the best soldiers in the world, except our own. And war means much to us;—to you, child. If Lincoln be not the utterly ignorant boor they represent him here—I saw him, and I don't think so; at any rate Seward knows what he is about—if they have any soldier worth his salt in their councils, or any seaman who knows anything of his profession in theory or practice, their first blow will be struck here, for the Mississippi and for New Orleans. If I commanded there, I would amuse the Northern rabble and the Southern armies with the parade of an attack on Virginia, and throw their whole force on this line. Then to hold this State—except by some-

thing like a desperate guerilla war . . . Ah ! you have no notion what that means."

"Monseigneur," Florence said, "it seems strange—" But she was interrupted by a livelier, less hesitating voice ; and to her great surprise and somewhat exaggerated annoyance saw that Eva, wrapping herself in her dressing-gown, excited by the conversation she heard not very clearly, had thrown open the door of her chamber and come forward to take part in it.

"Monseigneur," said the younger girl, laughing, colouring a little, perhaps at the consciousness of her own intrusion, but too innocent to feel the slightest suspicion that more than the breach of a conventional restraint, inapplicable to their intimacy, could be involved ; "if it were not for that skull and for your Cross I should—now, Florence, you won't let him beat me !—I should say . . . it looked . . . as if you were—afraid."

He turned with a smile which entirely dispelled whatever shadow of sincerity there might have been in Eva's pretended fear of his displeasure. "You know," he said, "what you deserve, though I should choose a different mode of correction, but that you are out of reach for the moment ! Yes, I am afraid, Eva ; *because* I have been a soldier ; and the more men know of what war means the more they are afraid of it."

"But," said Florence, "*you* need not meddle with it. You—I must not say you are an Englishman—but at any rate you are not a Southerner ; you have nothing to do with our quarrel."

"I should not like to look in your face six months

hence, Florence, if I were to take you at your word. Any man must fight, if there is to be fighting, for his home and the country of his adoption, if not of his birth. Our State has few trained soldiers, and very few indeed who have ever served in a cavalry regiment; and training cavalry is a long and difficult work. I shall wait a few days, because I think they will make me some definite proposal. If not, I shall offer my sword to the Governor in any position in which he may think it useful."

"Ah, why?" cried Florence. "Now it seems as if all the strange fear of my dreams were coming true. You don't care for slavery; you would as soon set your people free as not. You will not like to fight for the law that has made——" She paused, conscious that she was using an argument in which she herself had no belief, which was false to her actual sympathies; and aware by the expression of his face that it deeply pained without in the least degree prevailing with him.

"I hope I shall do my duty, Florence; I thought to have your entire sympathy."

"You must know that you have," she interrupted eagerly. "The cause is ours, not yours. But surely you know my—our hearts would go with you in whatever cause? Only I wish you did not think it your duty. Forgive me; I spoke, thinking only how strange that you should choose to risk your life for a cause in which you seemed but half to believe; I never meant what I was beginning to say."

"Thank you," he answered gravely. "We do not fight for slavery but for self-government. Meantime

it is my strong impression, though I don't think our neighbours share it, that this State will very soon be no place for women ; and for many reasons you above all . . . I mean," he said, checking himself, "I should like to see you clear of it. They will close our ports in a few weeks. Meantime I will manage somehow, and at any cost of difficulty or trouble, to send you wherever you would choose to go ; but I should say by preference to Jamaica. Hush, for one moment, Florence. It has occurred to me that, when I first proposed the same measure, you might think I did not mean it loyally, because I did not explain what provision was to be made for you there. Now, of course I never meant to leave you in any doubt or difficulty on that point. I have no doubt I can find you a home there, not perhaps so pleasant to you but in most respects as comfortable as this."

"Thank you, Monseigneur," said Florence, colouring deeply. "That is a very different thing. You know by what right you care for us here. Do you suppose that, when that tie is cut loose, we could live on your charity elsewhere ? Do you think we will leave you in danger, a danger that belongs to us, not to you ; a danger into which you thrust yourself for us and for our people ; and be your pensioners in the country from which you have been driven, whilst you are to be alone in peril, perhaps wounded or sick, fighting for ours ? No ! that is too much !"

"We cannot discuss it to-night, Florence. I came in to tell you the tidings I knew you would not like to wait for. Good-night, now ; and think this matter over quietly before I speak of it again."

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"Something has happened, Monseigneur," said Florence—giving to a name that had always more of playful kindness than of formality or subservience an expression of more than usual softness and tenderness—as she noted the weary harassed look on that young face, when Lionel returned some weeks later from one of the absences, lasting for days at a time, that had now become habitual; "something, I am afraid, that has pained or troubled you?"

"Two things, Florence; one of which troubles me bitterly on your own account. The other, save for you, would be more welcome to myself than I fear it can be to you. The enemy have closed the port."

Florence turned her face aside to conceal the delight of which she was conscious, and which showed itself without restraint in Eva's and Eugenie's brightening eyes and colour, while Rose actually clapped her hands with pleasure.

"I ought to have insisted, to have enforced my counsel; but it has always been hard to me to exact compliance from you, and it was especially hard where what was best for you was so great a sacrifice to me. But I reproach myself bitterly with what has been, I fear, one continuous failure in duty, from the first difficulty I found in your emancipation to the present hour."

"Do not, do not say so!" Florence answered, echoed by Eva for once with almost equal earnestness. "Monseigneur," said the latter, "what could emancipation have done for us, but to deprive us of the only friend we have? If," she continued, dealing frankly and clearly, from her very innocence of its full mean-

ing, with the thought that Florence had instinctively evaded—"if you could have placed us at once in other guardianship, equally safe if not so kind, perhaps it might have been best; I can understand that. But you knew from the first it could not be; and you knew that what might have been less well if we had been free was only kindness as we were, and as people think of us. And to send us away now! Florence was quite right; we could not have gone. You could not make us, but by force—and really and truly, Monseigneur, I had rather you had beaten me! I should have been less hurt and felt less ashamed, than if you had driven us from you now."

"Thank you, dear Eva," he replied. "If I have done anything for you—and whatever you may say I know how much more I ought to have done—I am tenfold repaid in your unfailing, and I fear undeserved, kindness. But there is another reason that makes me wish I had insisted. General Marion has communicated to me the orders he has received. You must not talk of them; they must not get abroad for a day or two——"

But Florence had turned as white as death, feeling what was to come. Then the colour rushed back to her cheeks, the tears to her eyes, and her agitation was so manifest that he paused and turned to her with anxious consideration.

"You are ill?" he said, with prompt, earnest sympathy.

"No," she gasped, trying to control herself. "Go on; what were you going to say?"

"As I say, you must not repeat it—may I trust

you, Rose and Eugenie—till the day after to-morrow? We march for Virginia this week.”

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It was necessary that Lionel should start at sunrise to join the cavalry regiment he had principally contributed to raise, had drilled and—securing the confidence both of the men and of the Government by his reputation, his Cross, and his unquestionable skill and energy, especially in the maintenance of a better discipline than existed in most of the volunteer regiments—had been appointed to command. In despite of his remonstrances, the girls had all insisted on rising long before daylight to bid him farewell; and the whole party were assembled at the unusually early morning meal, which was eaten in a silence broken only by his own occasional efforts to engage Eva in her usual kind of half-bantering conversation; by a few words spoken now and then in a low faltering tone by Florence, generally ending in a hardly-suppressed sob; and by the not infrequent weeping, utterly unconcealed, of the two youngest, from whom he had won the frank confident affection of childhood—mingled perhaps with something of deeper tenderness, since the regard originally inspired by gratitude had been quickened and softened by fear of an absolutely irreparable loss.

“Come, Eugenie!” he said at last, as the most passionate of the family gave way more completely than either of her two weaker sisters, “it is not very likely, except perhaps on one or two rare occasions, that an enemy will come within half the length of this gallery, and if they do—well, I may fire first.”

“Ah, that is cruel!” she cried, in a tone of such real and earnest feeling, such acute and heartfelt pain, that Lionel instantly and keenly repented the kindly meant but certainly thoughtless levity of an allusion to which he had not supposed her so sensitive. “I thought you saw how grieved and ashamed I was—though I did not know how to tell you—when you would not punish me; I could have borne it better if you had. You seemed so sorry for me, you were so very kind to me afterwards—I felt that no one else would have known how to forgive like you, even if any one else would have pardoned me; and that has made me so miserable ever since.”

“Don’t speak of punishment or pardon, dear child,” the young soldier answered, much more moved than at such a moment he dared show; rising as he spoke and buckling on his sword-belt, to which, as Florence now observed, was attached a sword-knot formed of a long thick braid of glossy straight black hair, bound here and there with silver. “I can’t take credit for forgiveness, Eugenie; it would have broken my heart to quarrel with you in earnest. Nay, my little *sister*, I have always been grateful for the misunderstanding that helped us to understand one another; give me a sister’s farewell kiss, and forget that I ever vexed you.”

The kiss was given with frank, affectionate warmth and willingness; but next moment Eugenie turned hastily away and left the apartment. Rose’s embrace, volunteered with the unconscious eagerness of childhood, ended in a childish outburst of unrestrained weeping. It was a harder task to take leave of the

elder sisters. At such a moment an excess of reserve was likely to defeat its own purpose ; to suggest the shyness or doubt he had been so careful never to arouse, and lead Eva for the first time to ask herself why there should be less than fraternal tenderness in the farewell of one for whom she at least entertained absolutely and simply a sister's affection. When fully accoutred—the light grey helmet worn by his regiment almost alone in the Confederate army, crowned not as usual by the plume of red and black, but by a lace scarf of the same colours carefully fastened to the crest—he stooped to the young girl, who had kept close beside him, rendering such assistance as her slender trembling fingers might, while her curls almost touched his shoulder ; and holding her for a moment within his left arm, pressed a kiss upon her brow. Then at the very last, aware perhaps that a single moment's lingering after *that* farewell would be intolerable, he drew Florence a little apart into the window next to the open door. “It has been hard for Afzul not to accompany me,” he said. “But I leave you the best, bravest, and most loyal guardian I could choose. In any case, from any danger, he will save you or die.”

He took her hand and lifted it to his lips ; but, as she raised her tearful eyes to his face, there was in them a look of enquiring reproach of which she herself was probably unconscious, which his heart could no more brook than his reason could answer. He bent to salute her as he had done her sister ; but, before his lips had touched her brow, the closing eyes, the form drooping from his hold, warned him that she was all

but insensible to the pain she had not strength to endure.

"She is fainting, Eva. Take her quickly. . . . Best so," he thought ; the door closed, and Florence opened her eyes only in time to catch one glimpse of his figure as he crossed the bridge at a gallop.

CHAPTER V.

FRIENDS AFAR.

“Yet, oh yet thyself deceive not ;
Love may sink by slow decay ;
But by sudden wrench believe not
Hearts can thus be torn away.”

Among the party assembled at Penrith Castle many months later was a young Southerner belonging to one of the proudest of the F. F. V. (the first families, who in the Old Dominion formed an aristocracy worthy of the English Cavaliers to whom it traced its lineage); the empty right sleeve of his coat fastened across his breast, a shade hiding the left eye and a certain weakness but too perceptible in the other, suffering, as is too often the case, from the injury which its fellow had received. Greatly admiring Miss Kavanagh, he was not a little gratified, perhaps a little surprised, by the willingness with which she seemed to submit to the adroit manœuvres whereby he succeeded in securing her as his companion at the dinner-table. What interest his conversation might have for her, apart from personal sympathy for a wounded soldier or for his cause and country, the young *attaché* to the unrecognized Confederate Embassy could hardly conjecture; or he

might have talked with less of the freedom and fluency natural to masculine vanity under the most delicate feminine encouragement.

“No,” he said, in answer to some remark of hers about slavery, “you English, taking your ideas from Mrs. Stowe, whose book is one continuous slander, and from a fellow like Sumner, as utterly misconceive the real nature of our relations with our servants, as the cant of Northern newspapers misrepresents the feeling or the position of your working classes. You would not care to hear me argue or generalize on the subject, but I can tell you one little anecdote—thoroughly characteristic—that fell within my own experience, or nearly so, if you care to listen. A young Frenchman—by the way, he wears your Victoria Cross—commanded a regiment of Louisianian cavalry on the very critical duty of reconnoitring the front of the enemy, during their advance on Manassas. He had that distrust of volunteers and untrained troops that all trained soldiers have, though he was perhaps the youngest officer in his own regiment; and it troubled him not a little that with the force immediately in his front was a regiment of the Federal regular horse, though most of its former officers were serving in our ranks. He had with him a big negro whom he had cured of the trick of running away. I could tell you that story, but it would be too long. So he said to this fellow: ‘Cuffy, you ran away and came back to please yourself; now you shall do the same thing to please me.’ ‘No, Massa,’ the negro said, ‘I was too hungry dat time.’ ‘Look here,’ his master answered, ‘for every cut I

gave you then you shall have an eagle now, if you do what I tell you. Go to the enemy, report yourself as a runaway slave, and tell them to-morrow night that you can guide them to—such and such a place—where they can cut off a company of ours. Come with them; only, when they find us, look out for squalls. Remember, if they keep you, they'll hang you.' Well, Beauregard had sent me down to the outposts that night; and, though I had no business to stay there, when I heard this story I waited to see the end of it. There was the appearance of a picket, with guard carelessly kept and horses standing about. But, hidden by the trees on either side, were half the 20th Louisiana Cavalry, one squadron mounted, the other on foot, with carbines loaded. The Federals made a dash and got, of course, into a little confusion; when d'Ultramar"—Alice started at the name, but her companion, whether from dimness of sight or interest in his own tale, did not perceive it—"d'Ultramar cried—his voice, low and lazy anywhere else, ringing like a trumpet on the battle-field—"fire!"—and the volley crashed from the other side into the rear of the astounded Regulars: "Charge!"—and his own squadron dashed upon them. I don't think half a dozen men out of the hundred got away. When it was all over, the nigger came up to him, and the Colonel flung him his purse. 'Now,' he said, 'you've earned your freedom. You may go North as soon as you please. But keep out of the hands of those fellows.' 'No, Massa,' the boy said. 'What good would freedom do dis chile? But, Massa, I nebber knew what fun runnin' 'way could be. Jest

gib dis chile 'nother chance to run 'way 'mong them
—— Yankees.' ”

Alice had listened to this anecdote with sparkling eyes, and a colour deepening much more than she was aware; but in another minute her attention was diverted from her much-flattered companion by the voice of General Vane, speaking a little louder than was his wont.

“ Yes,” he said, “ I was by Beauregard’s side at the outset, and with General Marion, who commanded the Louisianians and Texans, during some of the hardest fighting. I saw the Virginian regiments earn the title which has since been given to their chief; raw recruits standing as English veterans might have done, ‘ like a stone wall ’ under the pelt-ing fire. I saw the charge of the 4th Alabama, and, for untrained troops, I never saw a better thing. There was only one feat like it, and that I did not see but from a distance. Captain Custis, you carried the order, I think, that hurled the Louisiana Lancers on that terrible battery ? ”

“ Yes, Sir,” said the young American. “ But it was hardly the order that did it. When the battery began to sweep our front, crushing the Texan infantry so that no men could stand it long, I was riding along the front of the cavalry, who were half sheltered by the ground. I saw the Colonel, sitting his horse quietly and steadily as if on parade, in their front; but not sitting erect as men who have only to obey orders generally do; stooping and looking forward eagerly. As I came up to him and reined my horse for a moment to ask a question, a shell tore past him

and cut over two men and horses out of each rank. His face turned white. I thought, though I should have known him better, he was scared—men are scared by such things for the moment—but I was mistaken. He turned round, and though his men stood it pretty well, his voice trembled with rage as he called ‘Steady—close up there!’ Then he turned to me; he scarcely heard my question, and his voice quivered with anger and impatience as he said: ‘Do ask the General to let me go for that battery. He can afford to lose a regiment, but he can’t afford to keep the line where it is, if he will not. British infantry would not stand that!’—as another volley swept through the grey battalions on his right. I passed General Marion as I rode back. I saw it would be too late for orders from the Chief, and told him; and he bade me go back and tell the Colonel of the 20th to do as he pleased. As I said before, I had no business there, but I stayed to see what I thought would be Balaclava over again. I noticed then—it was a strange thing to notice at such a moment—that, conspicuous by the Cross, riband, and medal on his breast in front of his Lancers, he had made himself still more distinguishable by wearing on his grey helmet, instead of their usual plume, a lady’s lace scarf of the same colours, black and red; fastened in with extreme care, as if he would not lose it but with his life. He turned to his men, his face flushed with delight. ‘Steady!’ he said. ‘Be cool before all things; and keep your ranks. When we get into the battery, right section, first company, take care of the limbers; left section, look to the guns;

spike or disable them if we cannot carry them off. Now, keep your dressing—trot!’ They came over the ridge full in view of the battery; but the one thing he thought of was to keep them back, steady and in line; a very difficult thing with volunteers, impossible then with any other regiment in our service. But he had an unusual proportion of old soldiers from all parts of the world. We had got about half-way when I saw that the guns were trained upon us. Then that awful shower of shell tore through us and left, I suppose, a fourth of the whole regiment, men or horses, on the ground. They wavered for a moment; but keeping them so well in hand he got them clear, and closed them up in a few seconds; and then ‘Charge!’ he cried; and before the enemy could reload we were masters of the battery, and speared half the gunners—all, I might say, that did not run. Then again the man’s coolness told. There was a whole division of Federal infantry not far to the rear, and if we had gone on, as we should have done but for him, we should have been annihilated and the battery recovered. As it was, in three minutes, almost before the untrained infantry in our front had recovered nerve sufficiently to form square—a stupid thing to do, for their fire would have destroyed us before we could reach them—we had disabled, or dragged away—rendered useless somehow—every gun of the sixteen. One regiment, better commanded than the rest, fired a volley into us, and that was all I knew till next day. It saved that part of the line. Before other guns could be brought up, relief had come and the battle was decided.”

When the ladies had withdrawn after dinner, Alice—much pondering over what she had heard, much impressed, as women always are, by the soldierly reputation of the lover whose written entreaty through Lord Penrith for permission to explain or apologize to her she had rejected with indignant silence, deeply touched by the description in which she recognized her own gage, still cherished by one she knew to have been untrue to her—stood apart in one of the drawing-room windows, overlooking the Western terrace before mentioned. Lord Penrith and General Vane, pacing this retired ground alone, passed and repassed, their lighted cigars and the heavy military tread of the soldier rendering her aware of their approach in the darkness. She had not heard more of their conversation than seemed to indicate its reference to the war which then absorbed so much of English attention, and the impending struggle upon which the fate of New Orleans depended. But as they paused for a moment, at some little distance from the open window, she caught some sentences that had a deeper interest for her.

“Can’t you see, can’t you guess?” said the General. “Mind, he has not told me one word; and I dared not, even I, have asked him a question. That name has never been mentioned between us. But he nearly fought a duel—would have done had it been possible—in India, when the character of his intimacy with her and her mother was called in question. I was sure at Kulwar that she, no longer the child he thought her, was more in love than he would ever be. She was left friendless, helpless

here. I know the Eurasian temperament: I can guess what happened, though if he heard me I should have to answer for my guess. And, once thrown on him, whatever it cost he would be true to her; he would never think that a money provision could release him from the obligation or satisfy her claim, as other men think and hold themselves generous in thinking. I can conceive Lionel Darcy capable, where a woman is concerned, of any headlong error whose motive was not consciously selfish or disloyal. Misguided by pride, passion, or false principle—quite possible; but, much more probably, misled by overstrained generosity, Quixotic honour, or self-sacrifice. Sure, if he had to wrong some one, to hold to the weakest, probably the least enforceable claim. Ruthless, fierce, merciless, as merciless to himself as to others, utterly unbending and unforgiving—yes; wilfully false, treacherous, even ungenerous—never.”

Half perplexed, half convinced, far too intensely interested to remember that she had no right to hear what none would wittingly have spoken in her presence, she could not even will to withdraw before she heard the answer in the cold measured thoughtful tone of her kinsman.

“Yes, all that I can believe: I can guess or I can understand everything else; and Heaven knows, considering what men are and do, I would not venture to blame him for anything—but that, knowing what he knew, he should have spoken to Alice as I am sure he did speak.”

They passed on, and the rest of the argument was lost to her; but what she had heard made it

hard, if not impossible, for her to play her part composedly in the general conversation that ensued when the gentlemen, a few minutes later, entered the drawing-room. The young Confederate *attaché* was strangely out of conceit with himself, and wondered at the utter fruitlessness of his efforts to revive the interest he had thought to have won with her an hour before.

She sat alone in her room, having dismissed her maid, listlessly from time to time passing the brush over her long thick brown tresses, the golden tinge so beautiful in sunlight scarcely perceptible by that of her lamp, when a repeated tap at the door, seeming to insist on admission, roused her from her *rêverie*. She started and coloured when she saw who was the visitor. She guessed instinctively on what subject Lady Vane, a sufficiently intimate friend to venture on home questions, had sought so late an interview. The visitor drew a chair beside her, and looked earnestly into her face before she spoke.

“Alice,” she said, “we have been intimate friends since we were school-girls together; and you may quarrel with me if you please, but for your sake I mean to use, perhaps to press, the privileges of friendship to the utmost. I can guess what, even more than the fatal folly of his duel, drove Major Darcy from Europe. It was natural you should act as you did then, and those who might suspect the truth could not have ventured to explain it to you. Without entering into a subject neither of us would care to discuss, let me tell you what my husband said. You know he is not one to trifle with the obligations of

honour or right because, where women are concerned, men are too apt to make light of them; but he has said to me over and over again: 'If it be possible for a man to be almost blameless in such a case, I believe that Darcy was so at first; and that what seemed at last sheer treachery was what Alice herself, if she could understand the case, would recognize as the bitterest sacrifice of inclination to a mistaken sense of duty.' What neither he nor any other man will understand or can imagine, is why, how, fettered as he was, Major Darcy could have spoken to you. Alice, a woman can guess, if she can hardly dare to ask. It is for you to judge how far your conscience can find excuse for that one offence which your friends refuse to pardon or to understand."

The painful deepening of the girl's colour, the drooping eyes and form, spoke so plainly of the extreme distress she was enduring, that Lady Vane, whose sympathies thus far had gone rather with her husband's friend than with her own, felt repentant, and certainly unable to proceed. She rose and laid her hand gently on the bent head, as she kissed her friend with something of the caressing half-maternal fondness of an elder sister.

"Nay, Alice, don't fancy I think you have done anything, said anything, that in your place I should not have said or done myself. I would not have spoken thus, I would not have referred to the subject at all, but—but that—your happiness is in your own hands still. You know, I think, that we spent one night at Minnaroo, the plantation which Major Darcy has bought? You have heard, probably, the

story of that purchase ; and you will understand that, stormy as it was, we should not have stayed there, had my husband not been as sure of his friend's loyalty as I was that those girls to whose care he entrusted me when we entered, drenched to the skin by the sudden thunderstorm, were as utterly innocent, not only of wrong but of the very thought or fear of wrong, as you and Helen. Philip happened to mention your name in speaking of Lord and Lady Penrith, and of our English friends. He did not chance to look at Major Darcy's face as he spoke : I did ; and I saw more bitter pain, more passionate feeling, suppressed with greater effort, than I ever saw words produce in a human countenance before. Now, you must judge for yourself. You know how far you care, and what you think the love he still bears you worth. *He* will never speak again. He has accepted your answer or your silence as deserved, or at least as so fully justified by the appearances against him, which he will never explain, that if he would stoop to plead—and he might do so for you, though no other woman in the world would win such a concession from him—he would hold it useless."

Lady Vane had already left her friend, to think over what had passed, probably, rather than to sleep, when Lord Penrith entered his wife's dressing-room.

"Still up, Amy? You knew, I should be kept late. I hoped to have found you asleep."

"I could not sleep," she answered, "till I had shown you the packet you gave me. It was so like his punctilious loyalty to send it through you, so like his temper and his pride to doubt that you would

allow me to receive it! But you will see the explanation of his silence: that my last letters never reached him; only the brief hurried frightened note I wrote after the duel, in which I was forced to be simply silent on the one point on which he most cared to hear, has ever come into his hands. You know we had no address after Hamburgh, and evidently the letter I sent thither missed; and, not being received, he has concluded that you would not let me write. He has written this time to send me one or two papers of our mother's writing in her earliest girlhood, that he found in the packet Sir Francis left sealed and addressed to him. I don't understand the other—the verses in Sir Francis' own hand,—and he don't explain.”

The note which, leaning over her shoulder, her husband read as she held it for him was brief and almost cold.

Lionel to Amy.

“I may wonder, though not much—I may feel bitterly hurt, but I suppose I have no right to resent it—if your husband chooses to interrupt all further communication between us. He must think even worse of me than I deserve; and for my conduct to—in that matter I can offer no excuse or explanation. For the duel, I don't repent and will not affect to regret. A cowardly public insult to a woman's memory is cheaply atoned by death. But if you have heard the story which led me to purchase this place, you will have heard it in a form which will render Lord Penrith still less desirous of any further

intercourse between us—a feeling for which I can only say there is no true cause. I cannot regret all that I have lost, when I remember that, but for that loss, the worst that could have happened must have befallen the young ladies of whom, and of our meeting at Sivapore, I have often told you. But my purpose in writing these lines is not to question your husband's judgment, or to complain of what you know I must feel so deeply—this utter severance of the only close natural tie left me in the world.

“Among the packet of papers left me by Sir Francis were many relating to our mother. They explain all that we could not understand; but that explanation I cannot give you, unless from the enclosed verses you can gather something of his feeling. Her error was no more than mistrust of one who had not deserved to be mistrusted, a mistrust deliberately and spitefully fostered by others whose motives she could not possibly read. I trust this packet to General Vane, who promises to place it in Lord Penrith's own hands. It may be long, therefore, before you receive it; and when you do, civil war, which every day seems to bring nearer, may have closed all certain methods of communication. But any letter which once reaches the Southern States will reach me if I am then living. I need hardly tell you that, if my adopted country is engaged in a struggle for independence, my sword will be at her command. If, then, these lines reach you, Amy, take them for what may well be my last adieu to the person dearest to me in all the world, save one; no less dear now than you ever were to—L. D'U.”

“I suppose,” said Lord Penrith, “never man tortured himself in act and thought more ingeniously and perversely than your brother. Well, such self-torture is common enough, though not carried to such a degree, in very young men; and he bids fair to know enough of real trouble and sorrow in early life to be cured of making it for himself.”

“You are a little hard on him, I think,” replied Amy. “Not hearing from me in such bitter misfortune, and with his feelings so cruelly wounded in another way;—Edward—I cannot bear to speak about that. I don’t suppose that Alice has been to blame; but, whatever you may say, I can never believe that Lionel could have acted so ungenerously, so disloyally as you think. I don’t wonder you think so, for he seemed to admit it. But I have known him so intimately, so perfectly all our lives; and—it is simply impossible.”

Still doubtful, and yet most unwilling to dispute her profound faith in one to whom her isolation and her early orphanhood had bound her so closely, Lord Penrith evaded the subject by taking up the first of the enclosed papers—a copy of verses in the well-known hand of Sir Francis Clavering. What was the history they implied, what the feeling they expressed, even if he possessed a somewhat better clue to them than his wife, he could not or would not explain to the daughter of her to whom the bitter reproach conveyed in the last stanzas seemed to be addressed.

Human Sacrifice.

“Not in the storm that sweeps the battle-plain,
 For hearth and home, freedom and fatherland,
 Where manhood's passion quells Death's sting of pain :—
 To wile thy tedium, on yon crimson sand,
 Cæsar, we march to die !

“Not by the soldier's weapon but the slave's,
 Not by a foe's but comrade's hand we fall,
 Your sport, your mockery—yours ! What soldier braves,
 Cæsar Commander, that which waits us all
 Who may nor yield nor fly ?

“Lounge on your cushions, and with bended thumb
 Reprieve or doom us in the ignoble strife !
 Yet, as the victim waits your sentence, dumb,
 —Is all yon Roman rabble worth one life
 Of all that die to-day ?

“*Ave, Imperator ! morituri te*
Salutant ! throned in more than god-like power,
 Lord of the world, whose meanest slaves are we—
 Yet, in a Roman life's most glorious hour
 What wont the slave to say ?

“*Ave, Cæsar Imperator ! morituri te salutant !*

“From earth as from mine eyes, thank God ! that scene,
 That startled Hell to laughter, fades away.
 But if aghast I doubt ‘have such things been ?’
 Need I look far for Cæsar's throne to-day,
 Or the stern Sacrifice ?

“White hands, soft hearts ! who shudder but to think
 What Roman maidens watched with eager gaze ;
 At sight of flowing blood who sicken and shrink,
 And note the scars of shot or sabre-graze
 With half-averted eyes ;

“Horror-struck, that to amuse a listless Court
 Brave men should fight and fall and quickly die,
 Cast you the stones at Cæsar ? For your sport
 No soul of man writhes through worse agony
 To madness and to crime ?

“Your low sweet tones, your downcast eyes demure,
 Ne'er bade a comrade pierce a comrade's heart :
 Ne'er from behind the shield of sex secure,
 Slew stainless life with slander's poisoned dart :—
 Such sins have passed their time ?

"Ave, Cæsar Imperator! morituri te salutant!"

"And yet—the visioned death-march and the 'Hail!'

Thrill all my soul with pain's familiar tone.

Before the sword-clenched hands and faces pale

Ever a woman's form fills Cæsar's throne,

And proves my dream too true.

"'Ave!' The anguish quivering in that breath!

The bitter scorn that stern salute can hide!

The slow firm march to meet the lingering death

Of shattered brains, crushed hearts, and manhood's pride

Humbled to dust—for you!

"Ave, Cæsar Imperator! morituri te salutant!"

"Take, as we give you, freely! Shall we care,

Your poison drained, the empty gourd to keep?

If still our pangs amuse you, shall you spare?

Or we grudge toil for you, who dread the sleep

Ye haunt with dreams of pain?

"Shall Cæsar marvel why at his command

Slaves, whom he could but kill, march on to die?

Shall hearts like yours our fealty understand?

Enough for you, when on our help you cry,

You shall not call in vain.

"Only the hands that smite you may caress;

Ye soothe and fondle whom ye dare not prove.

Wronged, tortured, spurned, *we* serve you none the less—

Why waste the clinging clasp of anxious love

On necks that steel can chain?

"Ave, Cæsar Imperator! morituri te salutant!"

"Take all—but spare to thank us! Not for us

Cushion and canopy, soft word and smile!

Ours but to suffer, so your rose-leaves thus

Be smooth—or die, your leisure to beguile,

Or spare your childish tears.

"Your smiles our gift, your ease our travail's crown,

That not on us you smile, shall we complain?

Who thanks the hand that piles her couch of down,

Or prizes kindness while she knows not pain,

Or loves but whom she fears?

"Ave, Cæsar Imperator! morituri te salutant!"

“*Ave, Imperatrix!* Couldst thou feel the care
 In girlhood’s thoughtless flower familiar grown?
 Couldst thou be grateful to the vital air,
 Too soft, too close, too constant to be known
 While storms ne’er broke the spell?”

“‘Thankless?’ Thy welfare, not thy thanks, I sought;
 Not for thy love, but love of thee, have striven.
 ‘Hast wronged me?’ Past all words!—but how, untaught,
 Shouldst thou have read my soul? Go, child, forgiven!—
 Ask’st thou ‘for what?’ Farewell.

“*Ave, Cæsar Imperator! morituri te salutant!*

“What had I left to give, when all was given?
 What couldst thou give in turn, that I should prize?
 Yea:—that one sob, when on thy soul indriven
 The meaning of a ten-years’ sacrifice
 Flashed—brief as falling stars!

“And yet—as powers God gave for use on Earth
 Fade out unused, in darker drearer void
 Than death’s—I doubt. . . . Can womanhood be worth
 The life one woman’s folly hath destroyed,
 The mind one falsehood mars?”

“*Ave, Cæsar Imperator! morituri te salutant!*”

CHAPTER VI.

A GLIMPSE OF HOME.

“When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou.”

Florence to Lionel.

“Minnaroo, L^a, Sept^r, 1861.

“ . . . We hear that nothing is doing in Eastern Virginia. Do you not mean to come home for a while, now that you could so well ask for leave? Mrs. Duval says that quite a number of officers and privates from this neighbourhood are back on furlough. She is most kind and most useful; saves me all that I felt or fancied awkward in managing the household, after Cassia was gone; affords all the advice and protection that any governess could give, and yet is almost too considerate, too careful not to interfere except to enforce my wishes, and to make me what you insisted that I should be, mistress in your absence. It is much pleasanter not to feel directly and solely in charge of Eugenie and Rose, as they are are growing older—though they are very good to me. . . . But surely you are coming home this fall?” . . .

Lionel to Florence.

“Camp at Manassas, Va., Sept^r., 1861.

“ . . . Your countrymen have yet to learn that fighting is an occasional episode in a soldier's duty; not, as they fancy, the whole of it. They are asking or taking leave by thousands, and it becomes a professional soldier to set them a better example. Manassas put an end to active operations on this line; it was decided that we could not march on Washington, and they are in no condition to advance again. M'Clellan, by far the best man they have, is drilling, organizing, manufacturing an army and a staff out of a collection of the mobs with rifles and uniforms that they call regiments—very hard and thankless work. I find it quite enough to discipline eight hundred men into an effective regiment; and yet, I can tell you, Florence, I begin to be proud of mine. I have refused promotion, partly because I, as a foreigner, should have trouble with men who did not know me personally; partly because I am resolved that my Lancers shall not degenerate into mounted riflemen, shooting from cover, unable to charge, and ignorant of the use of sword and lance, like all the enemy's cavalry, and much of ours.

“I trust that your sisters are reconciled ere this to our arrangement, and to Mrs. Duval. Even had you not agreed with me so decidedly, I should have known that *you* would soon appreciate the assistance of a nominal and responsible housekeeper in place of a slave, and the protection of an experienced and well-educated woman. I only wish she could have been a

lady by birth, and of unmixed race—but you know how we failed in that. I am glad you feel able to dispense with Afzul. In a more settled state of things I hope that, despite the war, it may soon be possible to take decisive steps for the restoration of your legal rights. . . . I wish I could feel sure, Florence, that you not only forgive my original slackness; that you do not merely conceal for my sake the distress and vexation at its consequences you never allow me to perceive?” . . .

Lionel to Florence.

“Camp near Columbus, Ky., January, 1862.

“DEAR FLORENCE,—Your name, as you see, I can trace for myself; a brother officer is kind enough to write the rest for me. I have been constantly and closely engaged since they sent General Marion’s force here: where, as I think, the crisis of this struggle must be decided. Foreign, and even Northern attention seems centred on Virginia; but if we lose the Mississippi, the Confederacy is cut in two, and the operation may well be mortal. Marion was disabled—I fear, for life—in one of our first combats in this State. Since then, though I have again refused the promotion pressed on me in flattering terms, I have commanded a cavalry brigade; and three days ago was in charge, as senior officer, of a considerable force sent on a raid far into the enemy’s rear. It was a complete success. The journals will tell you what supplies we captured; I am sure we destroyed thrice as much. We cut in on a convoy under a strong escort of artillery and in-

fantry, and had a sharp encounter: in which we proved to my satisfaction, and I hope to that of the General in command here, what good cavalry handled as cavalry can effect. We captured the guns, broke the infantry squares, and made havoc to our hearts' content; not without loss, of course. I was cut off, at one moment, with about a score of ours; and we came off hardly enough. Afzul, saving my life not for the first time well-nigh at the cost of his own, is severely wounded. My own hurts I cannot regret, if the surgeons persist in their proposal to send me home to be nursed—though I am sorry to inflict such a burden on you all. They forbid another word; I may only sign my initials—L. D'U."

More seriously injured than his consideration would allow him to acknowledge to Florence, in this raid, which inflicted on the enemy as much harm as the loss of a minor battle, Lionel, with his devoted servant and comrade, was conveyed by steamer—the Mississippi being still under Confederate command—to a point not very far from Minnaroo, and carried home by his slaves on a rudely improvized litter, with a care and skill, suggested by sincere simple affection, of which he had thought them incapable. There he was now nursed by Florence and Eva, watched and waited on by the younger girls, with an affectionate, unfailing, vigilant care and attention which more than supplied the place of experience; and more deeply than ever endeared to him those to whom, according to even the surgeon's admission, he probably owed his life. But the intense, anxious, devoted tenderness

of Florence, the light-handed, quiet, gentle consideration into which Eva's livelier temper was subdued, however they might gratify and affect, could not surprise him. What seemed less matter of course, perhaps less natural, was the unwearied eager watchfulness of Eugenie; and, stranger still, the success with which her vehemence, her restlessness, even her passionate anxiety to be useful, were toned down and tamed to the moderation, the careful lightness of step and movement, the avoidance of all too energetic service, too earnest expression of feeling, desirable in a sick-room. He woke early one morning from a long sleep—produced by opiates given to quell less the pain than the feverish excitement, almost amounting to delirium, under which he had suffered for several restless nights and days—to note the young girl's eyes bent upon him with a close observant scrutiny, whose meaning he was too weak to understand, but which argued not only a tenderness but an intelligence hardly to have been expected from her. Her hands held the needle which she had been somewhat listlessly plying, and a corner of the new flag bearing the Starry Cross on the crimson field—the later battle-flag of the Confederacy—which Florence had somewhat reluctantly been induced to entrust to other hands than her own, and nearly the whole of which was her work.

“Is it you, Eugenie?” he asked faintly. “Are you alone there? No, no! don't disturb Florence or Eva on any account. I know how tired they must be. It was the last thing I remember, telling Florence she must go.” This had been many hours before he

fell into the slumber over the latter part of which Eugenie had watched, and he was wholly unaware that Florence had since then taken another turn of duty in the sick-room. This proof, as she thought it, of failing memory a little startled the very young nurse, who had noted in the calmer, clearer expression of her patient's eyes the symptom for which she had been told to watch ; since at this critical juncture his composure or renewed excitement on waking would indicate the chances of recovery or of rapid sinking.

“What is the matter ?” he said, reading the girl's disappointment in her too expressive countenance. “Oh, I dare say it is long since then ; but you need not disturb them now. I want nothing.”

She brought, however, the dose she had been told to administer, steadying perforce the wrist so prone to tremble with every varying emotion ; and was gratified to find it accepted as unquestioningly from her hand as from those to which he was more accustomed to trust.

“That is something new ?” he observed, as she set the cup down. “Well, you know, of course, child. Now be content. I am sure I am quite safe in your hands ; you won't miss the mark.”

Something in the peculiar turn of the phrase called the colour to her cheeks, and reminded him of an incident to which he certainly had not meant to allude.

“You had never seen before what wounds mean,” he said smiling. “I don't think, now, you could shoot at an enemy. Now, can you not forgive yourself what I never resented, never thought the worse of you for, when I understood what you meant? You did for

Florence only what I had been doing an hour before, and would do again. Well, if that will not console you, you have more than made up for a worse unkindness than that. I have seen, I have watched you, when I have lain so long half-stupid or too weak to talk; seen how quiet, how gentle, how kind you can be, how goodwill and pity can make you as careful and skilful a nurse as Eva or Florence. And if you put me in some danger then, you have done much more to spare me suffering and give me a chance of recovery now. Dear child, I know I owe almost as much to you as to either of them."

As he spoke, he took the hand that rested on the coverlet, and kissed it with something of the same old-fashioned courtesy with which she had often seen him salute Eva and, much less often but even more earnestly and reverently, Florence herself. The childish face, to which his words had recalled all the bright colour somewhat paled by long and close watching, evinced how much the respect as well as the tenderness touched her; and it was with difficulty that she controlled an impulse too eager, too vehement to accord with the restraint which, conscious of her own impetuosity, she had observed perhaps even more carefully than her elder sisters in the performance of her self-imposed duties.

"I shall never understand you," she said, speaking quietly, but unable to prevent her voice from trembling with feeling. "I shall never understand how you could so seem to forgive it away from your mind—your memory. Only that you could not laugh at me and play with me quite as you used, you were just the

same to me. No!—for you took such pains to make me *feel* forgiven, to seem to like me; made me ride and walk with you, and sit next you at supper—and talk to you, when I was ashamed to speak at all, instead of thinking me sullen. You wanted Florence—yes, you wanted *me*—to forget that I had tried to murder you; you would have it as if I had been good and grateful like the others. You would never even let me tell you—if I could have found words—how utterly grieved and ashamed I was; would not let me say ‘forgive me.’ Every day you made me feel it more and more. How could you bear to have me near you, to look at me, to hear me?—how could you take the hand that—— But I have tried to do my best, now you have been so very kind to let me help to nurse you—do let me ask your forgiveness now—and do say *in words* ‘I forgive!’”

“Dear child,” he answered, reading in the tearful eyes and trembling lip the emotion to which she would not give more passionate expression, “can you not believe that, if I had need to forgive, I forgave from the first; that I have never had an angry thought towards you? If, as you say, I was a little more careful afterwards, it was not from resentment. I was afraid—no, not afraid of your temper; I knew it would be under control for the future—but I had learnt how easy it was to wound you more deeply than careless words commonly wound children so young. And I speak only the literal truth when I say, I have liked you better ever since; thought better of you, that you could so utterly forget everything else in the wish to prevent or avenge a wrong to your sister.”

“You don’t, you cannot like me better for being passionate and revengeful, even if I had not been so near——”

“I respect,” he answered, “and sympathize heartily with the revenge that cannot forgive wrong to another. As Florence probably was much more angry with you than I, so I feel with you—it might have been possible to you to forgive me if I had ill-used yourself; you no more than I could dream of forgiving an outrage to one you loved.”

Not quite satisfied perhaps with his own morality, as uttered to a young girl, or wishing to relieve her evidently deep feeling on the subject, he added more lightly—

“I thought it was you who bore malice, Eugenie. Remember, you would hardly accept my kiss. Will you take it now, and forget for ever what I promise never to remind you of again, even in jest?”

The young girl yielded readily to the hand that drew her close to him, and accepted frankly the caress which, for both, only sealed the pardon in which she had found it hitherto impossible fully to believe. But still for a few moments she sat a little behind and out of sight of her patient, and remained silent till, busying herself so noiselessly about some trifle in the room, she asked—

“You are better now, are you not?”

“Yes,” he answered. “Better, because till now I scarcely distinguished between dreams and realities, and my head was heavy with confusion, and everything tired or excited me. Now—no,” as she turned somewhat hastily towards him; “you have not

disturbed me in the least, and there is nothing for which you should break your sisters' rest, so long as they will leave me to your care."

"But," she said, "if you are better, do you think Florence will ever forgive me for not telling her at once? Do you think she can really rest, even when she is asleep, while——"

It occurred to her on a sudden that she ought not even to reveal to the patient the extreme anxiety they had felt on his account. But he understood the pause, and answered with an expression half of amusement—

"Do you all forget that I am a soldier, Eugenie? that the chance of life or death so constantly turns on the incidents of a moment that, whether in the field or on a sick-bed, the nearness of danger can hardly disturb us? I did not think last night that I should recover: I have no doubt this morning. But you have kept back the papers, you have told me nothing for some days."

"Only two days," Eugenie said, eagerly. "I told you all I knew on Monday evening."

"And this is Thursday?" Tell me, now; it is easier to you than to Florence, who thinks every word will hurt me."

"There is very little to tell," Eugenie said, somewhat doubtfully, "but I know it would be useless to keep anything from you. They say our army across the river is still falling back; and, what you will not like to hear, the enemy's fleet off the bar has been strengthened. They talk about transports, and of trying to force the river."

“Transports?” he said; “of course, then, that means an immediate attack, and a serious one. The ships might run by, but if they have brought up transports they mean to take the forts. I don’t think they can, but I wish . . . Have you any idea when the surgeon will let me move again?”

“But you don’t want to take your regiment there? Surely, if I understand anything you have told me, cavalry could do nothing against ships?”

“Cavalry have done strange things in this war,” he answered. [This was long before Magruder’s Texan “horse-marines” captured some Federal gunboats at Galveston.] “But I don’t want my regiment. Only . . . if New Orleans is in danger, a Louisianian would like to be there.”

He had not noticed as he spoke, nor she, intent only on communicating unpleasant tidings as gently and safely as possible, that the door had opened too softly for either to be roused by the sound, and Florence had heard the latter words. He caught, however, the look with which alone she dared in his presence reproach what she thought her sister’s heedlessness; and answered it at once.

“If I could find fault with your devoted, faultless care, Florence, I should tell you that you have no idea what a mistake is that keeping back of bad news from an invalid, at a time when he knows that news of some kind there must be; and if too nervous to ask, frets all the more over the thought that he is kept in the dark. But Eugenie has been almost, if that were possible, as good and careful a nurse as yourself.”

The change in the tone of his voice, the collected intelligence in the eyes, as well as the quiet good sense of his reasoning, conveyed to Florence tidings for which, keen patriot as she was, she cared infinitely more than for the pending fate of the chief city of the Confederacy, and its effect upon the fortunes of her own State.

CHAPTER VII.

DISASTER.

One look, one last look, to our cots and our towers,
To the rows of our vines and the beds of our flowers!"

DURING his somewhat rapid recovery, or what he affirmed to be such, Lionel naturally enjoyed the society of his wards, and especially the unfailing kindness, the affectionate care of Florence, the more intensely for their long separation. "It is well worth being wounded for," he said to her, calling a bright flush of delight to her face. The life was even more thoroughly homelike than before, as his dependence on them removed much of the reserve which his own prudence—seconded, so far as in her perfect innocence was possible, by the instinctive shyness of Florence—had formerly maintained. It was impossible, however, as the need of constant attendance gradually disappeared, while he was still confined to his home, to revert naturally and easily to the usages whose meaning it would have been contrary to the whole law of his conduct to hint; and this difficulty was perhaps an important if not the chief motive of the decision with which, in

spite of the surgeon's warning and the girls' entreaties, he insisted on taking an early opportunity, afforded by the passage of one of the few steamers now plying on that part of the river, to reach the threatened city. His regiment, with many other Louisianian and Trans-riverine corps, had been recalled by the news of pressing danger to their native State and to a position so important to the Confederacy at large; but the Lancers were not ordered to the vicinity of New Orleans. They had suffered fearfully in the campaign, reduced to less than half their original numbers; and he was anxious to fill up their ranks with men of the same picked class from whom they had been at first recruited—partly young Louisianian gentlemen of French blood and French chivalric spirit, partly rough, active, somewhat lawless spirits of a lower social grade—Texan and Arkansan pioneers as well as Louisianians. But his chief purpose was to render what individual aid he could in drilling, organizing, and disciplining such new levies as, under the pressing danger, a State the flower of whose military population was already in the field could muster. He had worked hard for a week, and was weary in body, depressed by nervous exhaustion, as well as by deliberate judgment very uneasy for the future, when late one evening he repaired to refresh his spirits—ever greatly dependent on the exhilaration of female society, when the keener exhilaration of active warfare was withdrawn—in the drawing-room of one of the pleasantest houses in the most agreeable and most social city of the South. He was talking earnestly with a fair young girl, an ardent patriot, of American birth and

pure English descent, in the window opening on the half-lighted street, when a sudden sound like that of distant thunder startled them both. She looked up for a moment to the sky, and saw at once in the uninterrupted splendour of the semi-tropical heavens—every star, from the Pole to the Southern horizon, clearly visible—that the sound was due to no atmospheric disturbance. It was repeated again, louder and louder; and the girl's cheeks whitened, her lip quivered as she looked to her companion, who knew that her father held high rank among the defenders of the two forts at some distance down the river; on which, and on the defences or obstructions they commanded, the Crescent City relied for her safety. She laid her hand on his arm, seeing his unwillingness to speak and interpreting it only too truly.

“What does it mean, Colonel d’Ultramar? Tell me, pray tell me the truth. It can hardly be worse than I fear.”

“It is very bad, Miss Aspeden, I am afraid.”

“The forts are engaged?”

“Yes, the forts are engaged. But that means something more. The enemy are trying to force their way past, and that means that they know—more than I do—of the chances of success.”

The noise grew louder and more constant, till the practised ears of the many soldiers present had little difficulty in recognizing the increased intensity and quickness of the fire, and the increasing number of guns that must be taking part therein; also, the probability that instead of being repulsed the enemy were gaining ground, since only a limited number of vessels

could engage the forts from below, and if that number were exceeded it implied that some at least had run past. To run past, however, would not be enough. It might endanger the Crescent City, but could give no solid advantage to the enemy, unless their transports could come up the river; and this could hardly be till the fire of the forts was silenced by force or fraud. Men and women crowded to the windows, listening eagerly and looking out, though their sight could by no possibility discern anything that could add to or explain the inferences drawn from sound. Here and there in the far distance, a sudden flash or persistent glare against the dark sky night indicate the bursting of shells with less or greater frequency, but no more. So they stood, talking now and then in low tones, often absolutely silent for many minutes at a time, during two or three long hours. The mistress of the house—a lady most highly esteemed not only in New Orleans but throughout the State, as proud as fond of her distinguished husband—contrived to remain to all appearance calm, to perform such of the duties of hospitality as the absorbed attention of her guests would allow, with her usual composure. But as Colonel d'Ultramar turned to take leave he saw in the absent eyes, felt in the half-tremulous voice, her torturing anxiety.

“We all feel, Mrs. Aspeden, that the fate of New Orleans, which hangs on yonder forts as the fate of Louisiana on that of the city, could not be in better hands. The General will hold out as long as his guns can fire, and happily those forts are strong; the enemy's round shot may dismantle the batteries in the

end, but their shells, I hope and believe, can hardly do much harm among the defenders.”

There was so much of earnest sympathy in his tone—so greatly had the repute of his military dash and daring exaggerated, among the ladies of Louisiana, the idea of his military knowledge—that she expressed in reply, more freely than she would have done to many an older acquaintance and more experienced soldier, the feeling dominant in her mind.

“I might bear that; I cannot bear to think what will happen if the passage is forced. He will never endure to see New Orleans in the enemy’s hands, and know that he is held responsible.”

“No soldier, Mrs. Aspeden, will dream of holding him answerable for the fortune of war. After all, forts cannot hold out for ever.”

“But these were expected to do so, or our fate would never have been entrusted to them. And,” she added almost in a whisper, “I know he never thought so.”

Temporarily attached to the staff of the General in command, Lionel remained in New Orleans, constantly busy but chafing under a sense of enforced inaction, during the trying period that followed. It seemed at last a relief when—the enemy’s ships having forced the passage, the Confederate flotilla being destroyed after a desperate conflict, and the cannon of the victors commanding the city they could not occupy—it was agreed between the civil and military authorities that New Orleans should be abandoned by the latter. The general reputation of the enemy, the intense patriotism of the Southern women, and above all the character

of the Commander of the Federal land forces—then low, now blackened in history with indelible disgrace—determined many ladies at whatever sacrifice to quit their homes, and retire to that part of the State which it was hoped might still be held, even should the forts fall, and the enemy's troops be consequently able to occupy the city and make it a base of offensive operations. To Mrs. Aspeden and her daughters in particular, as to more than one other family, Lionel did not hesitate to offer the hospitality of Minnaroo. The story of his wards was well known to the first-named lady, as indeed there were few who had not heard some version of it. It was for her to decide how far the fact should influence her.

As he was about to rejoin the troops already commencing their retreat, Mrs. Aspeden detained him for a moment.

“I hope,” she said, with some hesitation, “you have not felt compelled by this exigency to—offer us a hospitality that—at another time you might—have thought it better to withhold?”

From almost any other, man or woman, he would have resented the question. But—dependent as are few men of his years, fewer of his profession, on feminine society and domestic kindness—he had found almost a home in that house during the rare leisure hours of his sojourn in New Orleans. He had been grateful for the almost maternal kindness of his hostess to one whose youth, personal beauty, and combination of fiery temper with chivalric courtesy reminded her of her own lost eldest-born; and her tone now had been kindly and considerate. The look

that met his quick defiant glance was sad rather than suspicious.

“Under other circumstances, I might have felt bound to ascertain beforehand the feelings of those whose wrongs have naturally rendered them acutely sensitive. But at this juncture I know too well what would be the wishes of Mademoiselle Dupont—in feeling and spirit, as in descent for generations, in refinement and education, as thoroughly a Louisianian lady as Miss Aspeden herself. Visitors to Minnaroo are her guests rather than mine. Whether I be there or not,” he added in a different tone, “I shall be glad to feel that she and her sisters have the advantage of a lady’s presence. I should have been utterly unworthy of your friendship for myself, if I could not frankly ask you to be the friend of my wards.”

“I thank you,” she answered gently, evidently moved by this appeal to feminine sympathy. “Under your roof we may well forget the prejudices you have earned the right to rebuke.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE AVENGER OF BLOOD.

“ Vengeance is God’s :
But God doth oftentimes dispense it here
By human ministration.”

COLONEL D’ULTRAMAR felt by no means so confident as did his guests and their advisers respecting the safety of Minnaroo. It stood at some distance from the Mississippi, and so far from New Orleans that, while the Confederate troops still held their ground to protect as much as possible of the inland country, it could hardly fall into Federal hands. But a cavalry raid, or an attack from forces landed by a flotilla, such as might possibly pass the guns of the Mississippian positions commanding the river, might reach and destroy it. As yet, however, there had been comparatively few of those senseless, wanton outrages on individual homes which afterwards cast so deep a stain on the character of nearly every Federal commander and of the Federal Government. For some time nothing occurred to alarm Lionel for the immediate safety of his guests during his absence with the Louisianian forces that were maintaining a war, which gradually assumed more and more of a partisan

or guerilla character, along the military frontier. In this service the 20th Louisiana Cavalry much distinguished themselves; their operations, despite the prejudices of their commander, became more and more irregular in character; but their utility was so obvious that he soon learned to make even freer use of the various qualifications of his strangely assorted troops, the skill of the lawless desperadoes from the Texan and Arkansan frontiers that formed a considerable part of the corps, their ingenuity, resource, and very unmilitary weapons, than almost any other Confederate officer. On one or two occasions he brought in prisoners, caught by the lasso as a small party dashed at full speed across the outposts of some Federal force too strong for a direct attack. On others he had stolen by night far within the enemy's lines, cutting off pickets, destroying patrols, capturing couriers and convoys, and making his name a terror to the whole line of the invader's advanced posts. Under a General utterly without the feelings of a gentleman or the experience of a soldier, the undisciplined volunteers from Massachusetts and the rest of New England, especially fierce political partisans as well as savage enemies, became infuriated by the harassing duty, the incessant vigilance required of them, the constant uneasiness created by these attacks; and began to avenge themselves on helpless victims for the injuries received from an enemy it was not easy to catch nor perhaps very safe to come up with. Accounts of devastated plantations, and defenceless dwellings burnt in mere wanton ferocity, exasperated Lionel's soldierly spirit as much as they

roused the vindictive passion of the Southerners themselves; and it was in an evil temper that he bade his trumpet sound the *reveillée*, when a negro fugitive brought him word of a Federal infantry force threatening two or three plantations within ten miles of the quarters, on an island of firm ground in the midst of a dense swamp accessible only by one circuitous path, where he had made his camp.

Approaching stealthily, and sending forward scouts picked from among the most skilful and experienced of the Western hunters and trappers under his command, he became aware that the rear of the invading force was but ill-covered, while the main body was employed in the work of destruction, guarding somewhat more carefully its front and flanks. Reconnoitring minutely that which, according to General Pope, should be a commander's sole care, the line of the enemy's retreat—with which, by the way, that renowned strategist never found himself practically concerned—Colonel d'Ultramar perceived that, unless they should clear their way far to their left, their route must narrow itself, between swamp and impassable jungle on one side and an unfordable river on the other, into a defile of some two furlongs in width and more than a mile in length, where a rough country road passed through a wood, practicable enough, but affording excellent shelter to infantry or dismounted horse. Occupying this with half his force, dismounted, and armed with what were called carbines—a rifle somewhat lighter than that of the infantry—he was advancing with the rest upon the rear of the enemy's left flank, so closely that absolute

silence in the ranks had been strictly enforced ; when, as he rode forward a little to reconnoitre, a frightened flying girl, bonnetless and with dishevelled hair, almost ran against his horse unawares, and then, seeing a soldier and not in her confusion recognizing the uniform, endeavoured to escape the new peril. He sprang down and caught her by the hand.

“Stop!” he said, with difficulty controlling his voice to that calm tone, which of itself was more likely to soothe her terror than words she would hardly understand. “Can you not see we are friends? What has happened?”

The fugitive, almost a child, looked up, quieted rather by his manner, and by the youthful beauty of the face into which she gazed, than by the sight of the uniform whose colour at that moment she hardly saw or would have remembered.

“They are burning our house there. Do you not see?” she panted, pointing where a column of smoke was visible through the trees. “Papa fired at them, . . . and they have killed him, I believe. And——”

“Well, that will do,” he said, his clenched teeth suppressing with difficulty the curse that rose to his lips. “Are any of them standing in line—on guard? Do you understand me? Are any of them what we call formed? Have you seen our soldiers under arms?”

The child made a desperate effort to compose herself, to understand and to answer. “No,” she said, “not there; but over yonder,” pointing to her left, “I saw a long line of steel flashing in the sun.”

“Here,” he said, leading her by the hand to the

foot of a tall tree with dense foliage that stood near. "You can climb into this; you will not be safe on the ground. Climb as far as you can. Let me lift you."

The girl complied; and obtaining a foothold on the lowest branch, obeyed his directions with more promptitude than he could have expected; and, despite her terror, looked forth eagerly from among the branches on the steady quietly advancing line, till they halted for a moment as their leader once more rode forward alone to observe the enemy whom she could and he could not see.

"There they are," she cried, pointing. He could not see, but heard. "They have their backs to you, I think."

He reined up at once, resuming his place at the head of his squadrons. "Now, men, be steady; keep cool; kill, but don't pursue. Charge!"

They dashed forward at speed. Taken by surprise and at terrible disadvantage, it did credit to the half-trained, half-demoralized Massachusetts Volunteers that they did not run. Facing about, they could but fire one aimless and ineffectual volley before, their commander three lengths in front, the Lancers burst upon them. The best European infantry, formed in square, might have failed to repel that charge with the bayonet alone; the inexperienced Unionists were powerless as children to stand against it. Their line was instantly broken up, overwhelmed, crushed by the shock. The actual slaughter was terrible, for the exasperated Confederates made no prisoners: as an available military force this entire wing of the Federal

brigade was simply annihilated. The scattered parties engaged in the actual work of robbery and arson, sometimes caught *flagrante delicto*, sometimes flying, in one or two cases huddling together in larger numbers without formation, were destroyed or dispersed—falling in scores by the lance, the sword, or the bullet. Then, recalling his men to their ranks, Colonel d'Ultramar swept along what had been the Federal front; till, where a thin grove of trees screened a large open space, the wasted fields of two contiguous plantations, beyond which lay the defile he had already seized, he caught sight of a considerable body of the "blue-coats" in regular formation, rather more than a quarter of a mile distant. Wheeling into line, and passing at a slow walk through the trees, he was able so to control the fiery spirits he commanded as to restore the regularity of their order in front of the levelled rifles, too distant and too unsteadily held to do serious execution. Halting immediately in advance of the trees, they saw that the remnant of the enemy, some six hundred strong, were retiring quickly but in order and by alternate sections, each facing about as the other retreated.

"Quietly, men!" cried Lionel, as the Lancers were again on the point of breaking loose, some five hundred yards from the enemy. "We have them in a net; and I am not going to waste your lives in order that they may break its meshes."

He halted the line a while; and then, following at such a distance as rendered the enemy's fire ineffective, threatened momentarily to charge; thus quickening their retreat, and shaking more and more the nerve of

men demoralized by the work in which they had been engaged, by the slaughter of their comrades, and by the apprehension that in the apparently probable case of defeat—defeat is ever the anticipation of young soldiers forced to retreat—no quarter would be given by those who had witnessed their crime. The Southern leader had rightly calculated the effect of the terror which the fugitives from the detachments first destroyed had spread among their comrades. Scarcely any of them had nerve to take aim even when they did fire; and it was with no slight difficulty that their officers kept up the appearance of steadiness in their ranks, as they fell back before the advancing cavalry towards the wood in which they hoped to find shelter. The constant visible menace of an attack sufficed utterly to prevent the discomfited Unionists—volunteers who had never seen a pitched battle—from recovering nerve and firmness for a single moment. At last a certain wavering, a halt in the retreating division, and then a cry of dismay, told that the occupation of the wood had been, if not discovered, guessed by those who had hoped it would afford them a refuge. The Federal commander struggled desperately to form his men so as to oppose a steady line to the charge of the cavalry in the rear, while endeavouring to force what might still prove to be only a thin curtain of skirmishers in his front. Alone perhaps among his infuriated followers, Colonel d'Ultramar could admire the coolness, the indifference to personal exposure, the bitter indignation with the cowardice of the soldiery whom after all the license he and his superiors had permitted had

turned into cowards, displayed as the mounted officer spurred his white steed along the wavering line of Federal bayonets. The Lancers were at this moment halted. Their chief, after a minute's hesitation, turned to the man immediately on his right rear, a reckless Texan rider and the most splendid marksman in the regiment.

“Bring down that Colonel, Douglas!”

Almost before the words were spoken the white charger reared, sharply bitted by his rider in the death-agony; then darted away as the horseman fell heavily to the ground. A ringing cheer burst from the Confederate line. The leader turned, rebuking it with a look of bitter scorn.

“Steady yet!” he said, turning again and fixing his eyes on the wood, while his men watched impatiently the endeavours to form still continued by the Yankee officers, without appreciating as he did their utter futility. At last, as the companies facing the defile which was now the immediate objective of the Federal march approached within some two hundred yards of the wood, a crashing volley from thence shattered their ranks and threw the whole force into confusion.

“Now, charge, Lancers!” cried their Colonel, himself setting spurs to his horse.

There was nothing like organized resistance. Most of those who fronted the wood turned to the rear; those confronting the Confederate cavalry ran for the shelter of the wood, to be shot down as they neared it. A few braver individuals stood fast and fired, but with little effect. They were cut down but a few

moments sooner than those who threw away their weapons and ran for their lives in every direction. Victorious soldiers, justly infuriated by the sight of wanton outrage and havoc, show little mercy; and Lionel, though he disdained to take any personal share in the vengeance of his men, did not choose to restrain it. In his opinion it was the fitting military retribution for such crimes, and the most effectual method of checking them, and affording to the defenceless women and children of Louisiana that protection which it was his paramount duty to give.

“I wish all such crimes may be as well avenged,” he said. “General —— will have something to answer for to his Government, if they are.”

Turning his horse and riding towards the house, while the trumpet sounded the recall, he looked for a few minutes on the scene of crime and havoc that he had so fully avenged. An old man, his hand still clasping the rifle with which he had so fruitlessly endeavoured to defend his dwelling, lay dead on the threshold, the corpse scorched by the flames that were still raging there. Lionel drew it beyond their reach. “We will bury him with our own dead,” he muttered. “For yonder felons, let the crows and wolves have their carcasses.” While the grave was hastily dug with tools collected from the negro quarters, he rode back to the tree where he had left the girl. Only part of the terrible scenes through which he had passed had been visible to her; but she had heard the order to “kill,” and by the screams that had scarcely yet ceased she judged how well it had been obeyed. Her fair childish face, naturally soft and gentle as it was,

was set in a stern vindictive expression, scarcely more unnatural than that which had transfigured to her tearless blue eyes the features of the young soldier. He sprang from his horse and assisted her to the ground.

“I have avenged you,” he said, “if the death of some hundreds of those wretches be vengeance, to your heart’s content.”

The girl placed her own right hand frankly in that which had assisted her descent, without shuddering at the blood that stained it.

“I thank you,” she replied. “Was vengeance all you could give?”

“All; except the last honours to your dead and our own. I came to ask if you will be present while these are paid?”

The white face whitened to an even deeper pallor, a slight shiver came over the form so unnaturally erect; but she bowed her head in compliance and walked steadily beside him as he led his horse by the bridle, till they reached the place where the grave was already yawning to receive some score and a half of Confederate soldiers and the grey-haired citizen. The consideration of some of the gentlemen of the corps had enveloped the latter in a cloak taken from the saddle of the Federal Colonel.

“Not that!” said the girl, shuddering, as she plucked it off and looked on the calm set face, peaceful as in sleep, save for the deep black hole in the centre of the forehead.

At the risk of his life, a Louisianian officer had plunged into the burning building and contrived to

drag from it a blanket in which to envelope the corpse. For their dead comrades no such shroud, no concealment of the features was needed. Those who alone were present to mourn them were well accustomed to look on death. Standing at the head of the grave, the young girl now supporting herself by his arm, Lionel repeated a few of the most familiar parts of the Anglican ritual he had so often heard at a soldier's funeral. Then, as he turned to look on his now trembling companion, he was deeply touched to see that one of his youngest soldiers—last of three sons of a widowed mother, whose elder brothers had already fallen in the ranks of the Lancers—had placed in her hand some dozen white blossoms, picked from among the ruins of what had been that morning her own flower-garden. At a light touch of the Colonel's fingers on her hand she dropped them into the grave; and he led her away while the earth was filled in by his men, and a volley from a hundred carbines at once honoured the lost and celebrated the victory.

“We have no leisure, no time to stay here,” he said to her. “And you, I fear, have no time for mourning. What can we do for you? Where can we take you?”

She tried to speak; but to his infinite relief this last effort broke down her unnatural composure, and she burst into violent weeping. He stood patiently supporting her till the grave had been filled up, the regiment, under the direction of other officers, had remounted and reformed, and only waited till he should give the signal for the march.

“Can you not tell me,” he repeated, “to what friend

I can now convey you? We will send you safely, wherever it be, within our lines."

"No," she answered. "Our neighbours' houses have perished like our own. I know no one to whom I could go now."

"Then," he said, "you must be my guest, as are several ladies now; more than one of whom will show, I doubt not, a mother's care for you. Mr. Francis"—to the young private who had procured the flowers—"it shall be your duty to escort this young lady to Minnaroo. Take four of your comrades"—and he scratched a few lines in pencil on a leaf of his pocket-book and tore it out. "Take this; it is not often one can write home. Nay," he added, as the young soldier's face seemed to show some surprise or reluctance, "you will come back quickly; but you have earned this trust. The fittest guardian, for the moment, of an orphan's solitude"—speaking in a tone audible only to the youth—"is he who showed the keenest instinctive sympathy, paid the most graceful attention to her sorrow."

The boy, he was certainly no more, blushed with pleasure at the compliment from one to whom all his soldiers had learned to look up, with a feeling that partook almost as much of awe as of regard and admiration. The silence of his charge on their route left him ample time to muse on the strange contrast of feeling in the soldier, who within one half-hour could witness the slaughter of hundreds, could look with apparent indifference on the massacre of a routed foe, and could note so closely and approve so heartily that little touch of delicate kindness to a solitary mourner.

As he had sent forward one of his comrades to announce their approach and the nature of his charge, the party were received under the portico of Minnaroo by Florence; rather perhaps by Mrs. Aspeden who accompanied her, but whose consideration—bespoken by Lionel and thoroughly won by the unconscious appeal of the young Creole's shrinking timidity and the frank simplicity of her sisters—took care at once that the mistress of the house should have her proper place, and that she should feel neither difficulty nor awkwardness in the actual performance of its duties.

Dismounting, and saluting with profound respect first the wife of a distinguished Confederate officer now languishing in a Federal prison, none the less respected for the hard fate which had compelled him to surrender a critical position—next, the silent girl whose story he had heard, and whom he instinctively recognized as one for whom his commander would exact a stricter reverence than for the proudest lady in Louisiana—Francis handed to the latter the pencilled note. She read it hastily, and then pointing to a spot he had not noticed—

“It is red!” she exclaimed. “Is he wounded?”

“I think not,” Francis answered, perplexed and doubtful.

The young orphan with him, who still clung to the support which Mrs. Aspeden's motherly arm had afforded to her fatigue, shyness, and sorrow, interposed with kindly consideration; prompted probably rather by grateful recollections of the writer than by interest in the receiver of the missive.

“That can hardly be, if the note were given you

by your Colonel," she said. "It was he, was it not, who stood by me at—at the funeral? He was with me for ten minutes before that, and he walked and stood quite steadily, and gave me his arm during the ceremony."

"We had been through sanguinary work," said the youthful soldier to Florence. "I don't think Colonel d'Ultramar can be hurt. Will you give me any message for him in return? We must rejoin at once."

These words roused Florence to a consciousness of the hospitality due to any party entrusted with such a mission; but most of all to the comrades of the owner of the dwelling before which they stood. She was almost too timid to speak, however, and Mrs. Aspeden gracefully relieved her of the difficulty.

"Shall I," she said, "ask Mrs. Duval to attend to the refreshment of these gentlemen while you write your note?"

The girl gratefully embraced the opportunity of retreat, but did not reappear; and it was by Eugenie's hands that her little packet was transmitted to its bearer.

"Tell Colonel d'Ultramar," said the young girl, as the soldier, scarcely three years her senior, looked admiringly into her bright frank face, "that we are comfortable; more so than we have ever been before in his absence. But tell him I wish"—she hesitated a good deal—"I wish—not for myself—that he would come back, if only for a day. If not, let him send *me* word if he is wounded, not to my sister."

She coloured and stopped, as if conscious of an

indiscretion, which, however, appeared a very matter of course to him who heard her.

“You forget,” said the Lancer, saluting, “you have not told me whose message I am to give to my Colonel; and though it would be easy to describe you, he is not one with whom a young soldier ventures to take a liberty.”

Her lips parted, as if to answer simply and in one word. Then, perhaps for the first time, she realized the loss even of name that slavery involved.

“Give it me back for a moment,” she said, and wrote a few characters in the corner.

Francis did not of course venture to examine them in her presence; but at the first halt he drew forth the note, presumably to ascertain its safety, and looked somewhat curiously at the pencilled line on the outside. If he wished to learn the name of the young maiden, whose beauty and spirit had interested him more than the riper loveliness which, he supposed, belonged to one whose rival he could not even in fancy have presumed to become, he was disappointed. The message ran:—

“Send bad news to me, not to F.—Eu.”

CHAPTER IX.

RECONCILIATION.

“‘Forgive me—mine was jealousy in love.’

‘That is love’s curse : pass on, my Queen, forgiven.’”

THE guest-rooms of Minnaroo afforded fair accommodation for the considerable numbers of the party that now occupied them ; and Mrs. Aspeden had not allowed Florence to disturb herself or her sisters in the apartments appropriated to themselves almost since their infancy ; feeling perhaps that one so shy, so conscious of her social disadvantage as the young hostess, required the shelter of a privacy upon which her guests were not likely to intrude. She herself, if not the eldest, the highest in social rank among them, set the example of respecting this privacy so strictly that it startled Florence and Eva not a little when, somewhat late one evening, her gentle tap requested admission to their *boudoir*. One glance at her face, carefully as it had been composed, suggested alarm to the quick, sensitive, and now ever-fearful girl.

“You have bad news?” she said, instantly and almost breathlessly, springing to her feet. “Tell me at once, quick, the worst ! Don’t stop to break it !”

“No, Florence ; it is not so very bad, especially if you will bear it with composure. You know the enemy have been driving back our troops rapidly of late ? And we heard—though I did not like to tell you, I think you know—that the General had resolved to make a stand ; and that sharp fighting might be expected, but on ground advantageous to our men.”

“Stop, pray !” cried Florence. “You cannot mean that he is killed ; but is he wounded or prisoner ?”

“Hurt, but not dangerously,” Mrs. Aspeden continued. “It seems that the infantry lined a long trench or series of trenches dug in the wood on two sides. Between these was a wide open space that had once been a plantation ; and here the infantry were supported by the cavalry under Colonel d’Ultramar. The enemy so placed their artillery that its fire converged on the centre, and within a few minutes the infantry there were broken. Then the enemy’s cavalry charged to scatter them completely. Colonel d’Ultramar’s brigade met, broke and drove them back with terrible slaughter. But for once they seem to have got out of hand, or he did not know where the guns were ; for as they fell back they were shattered by a terrific artillery fire. Under cover of this the enemy sent a brigade of infantry to force the centre. They say that everything hung on the holding that part of the line for five minutes, till the reserves could come up. Colonel d’Ultramar threw himself with the remainder of his brigade upon the enemy’s bayonets, or rather into their converging rifle fire. The survivors reached and broke the line—they say no other

cavalry in the Confederacy can charge through fire as he has taught his men to do—and they saved the day; but the brigade is almost annihilated. The position has been turned and evacuated, and it will grieve the Colonel deeply that his splendid force has been destroyed and so many of his dearest friends and comrades killed, so gloriously, indeed, but to so little practical purpose.”

“But he?” urged Florence, impatiently. “He?”

“He would hardly have cared to come unwounded out of such a service. He is hurt, but they say not very severely; and, Florence, they are bringing him here. He spoke very gratefully of the care and judgment you and your sisters showed in nursing him before. But you will let me help you now? To keep him quiet, spare him excitement and strong feeling, will be the great thing; for I must tell you it is not the wounds I fear. In New Orleans I saw how feverish he still was, how imperfectly he had recovered. Dear child, you had better know the whole truth. The fatigues of the campaign have told terribly on his strength. It seems he was wounded in that skirmish of which Mr. Francis told us, and neglecting what he called a scratch, it had become serious. The wounds he has received now the doctors say are not dangerous in themselves; but he has no strength left, and they tell me that the surgeon fears what we call the country fever. You know what that means.”

“Too well,” said Florence, turning deadly pale. “That cost both the lives I held dearest; and now, is it to take him who, for me and my sisters, has almost made up the loss of both? You will help me? Yes,

but you will not expect me to think of myself, of anything else, till he is better? He would have told you, if you had asked him, that we did not talk, did not trouble him. You may trust us now."

Mrs. Aspeden could not tell Florence what she really feared; less any indiscretion, any strong manifestation of feeling on the girl's part than that too eager interest, too conscious insight on his side which, under the circumstances, other and elder female friends in the house, Florence's anxious devotion, Florence's constant attendance might excite. And there was excitement in store of another kind, excitement which she knew not how to spare. It was a strange but probably a sound intuition which entrusted the charge to so young a girl; for, after all, the instincts of affection and the knowledge of intimate acquaintance might be worth more than the prudence acquired by mere lapse of years and experience.

"Do you know," she asked, "whether Colonel d'Ultramar has been anxious about his friends in England; whether he hears often from them?"

"I think," Florence replied, "he has never heard; and he has never spoken. Ah! but," she said, the recollection flashing across her mind, "he spoke once when he came here first. What is it? There might be news, I don't know what, from England that might trouble him terribly."

"And," said Mrs. Aspeden, "we can of course form no notion what the news is. But a blockade-runner brought to the British Consulate at Charleston the other day a packet which has been forwarded by a special courier—which was brought across the Missis-

sippi by a boat engaged on purpose. Either it is of great importance, or his friends are eager at any cost to reopen communication with him. We cannot well withhold it; and yet——”

“Trust it to me,” Florence said, quietly. “I will manage to give it to him at the right time, at least that it shall do as little harm as possible.”

Whether Mrs. Aspeden herself had over-estimated the illness reported by an orderly sent on to prepare the household for its owner's arrival, whether she had underrated his previous illness, or whether Florence had received a more alarming impression than her friend had intended, the first sight of the young soldier's face as he was lifted from the litter and carried by Afzul (who had accompanied him during the last operations) and by the orderly into his room, caused her less fear than relief. He did not seem worse than on the former occasion, if even to her eyes visibly weaker from prolonged fatigue, and from loss of blood. He was calmer, more collected than then, and his wounds themselves, she soon learned, were not dangerous. It was in truth the anxiety, the hardship, the strain on nerve and muscle, not the actual injury received from ball and blade, that had tried so severely a frame never quite strong enough for the spirit that animated it. For some time, whether through his own or Mrs. Aspeden's management, Florence never found herself long at a time alone with her patient, had no opportunity of preparing him for the receipt of what she could not but conjecture—remembering the strong language in which he had described the misfortunes

that had sent him as an exile to Louisiana at the critical moment of her fate—might be tidings of painful, at any rate of extreme interest to him. On the third day after his arrival she was still doubtful of the nature of the fever that undoubtedly hung about him; not recognizing the decided symptoms of that severe malarial disorder which, in the lower lying regions of the Gulf States and of the Carolinas, is scarcely less dreaded than the awful scourge of yellow fever itself. But seeing as yet fewer indications of that extreme excitement, verging on delirium, which had alarmed her before—since the most discouraging symptom was mere weakness, a weakness that would not yield to rest, stimulants, or food—Florence, whose limited experience did not realize the seriousness of this peculiarity, thought that she might safely venture on giving what indeed it was impossible long to withhold. She had engaged him gently in conversation, allowing him to observe that she avoided the one topic which engrossed the thoughts of both—the war which more and more overbore all other questions of public and private interest, as it came nearer to Southern homes, besides cutting off so many of those on whose lives the brightness of those homes depended. It might seem to be for this reason alone that she drew him to speak of England and of his English friends, almost for the first time.

“Yes,” he said in answer to a shy question of hers, “I wrote to my sister by General Vane, but I have very little hope of an answer.”

“Did General Vane think she would not answer you? I could not believe it; you seem to have loved

her so dearly,—she could hardly be willing, whatever had happened, to forego a last chance like that; to answer you again with silence.”

“You forgot,” he said, with a sigh, “how terribly difficult communication has now become. Even if Amy wished to write, she would know that her letters were more likely to fall into the enemy’s hands than mine.”

“Ah, no!” Florence answered. “So many blockade-runners do get in, and I know they have brought letters lately;” and she looked half playfully, yet with earnest sympathy, the suggestion she was afraid to speak.

“Are there any?” he cried, with a momentary excitement that made her doubt her own judgment. Then, as he saw its effect, carefully suppressing all sign of agitation:—“Are there? Yes, I see there are! Thank you, Florence; it is fitting that Amy’s first letter should come to me by your hand.”

He tore the packet open with an eagerness forgetful even of her presence. With no thought of intrusive curiosity, consequently with no fear of seeming intrusive, she watched his face as he turned over the four or five enclosures. As he came to the last, she was alarmed to see the sudden change of countenance. The deadly pallor, the trembling of the whole frame, the startling lustre that came into the eyes at first half-eager, half-dazed, gave proof of vehement emotion of whatever kind; and she wondered the more that his hands seemed almost to flinch from opening it. Surprised into consciousness, she was drawing back out of sight and reach when he, even then alive to

her feelings, turned for a moment and pressed her hand.

“Thank you once more. You have given me more here than I had any idea of. No, don’t go away, Florence; if you will pardon my reading these in your presence.”

She drew back nevertheless where he could not see her without turning from his letters, and so placed herself that she could not even seem to be a spy on the emotions with which he opened them. But she could not help observing that, though some minutes passed before he could open it, that which he had taken up last was the first he perused; and that more than half an hour elapsed before he even looked at any of the accompanying enclosures. The sight of that unfamiliar but instantly recognized handwriting utterly overpowered him. Even had Alice but directed by chance some papers in which she had no interest, even if she only wrote to reproach—such were the self-torturing fancies, as reasonless as Florence herself could have entertained, that passed through his mind—still how much it was to see those characters again! It was at first with almost as much incredulity as gratitude—an incredulity arising from the very delirium of joy—that he read what Alice had written the day after her midnight interview with Lady Vane.

Alice to Lionel.

“I never felt, never understood how I had wronged you, Lionel, till last night one whom I think we both alike esteem and honour said—not knowing that I heard him: ‘I can conceive L. D. capable, where

women are concerned, of any error that is not selfish or disloyal. Misguided by passion, pride, false principle—very possibly ; more probably misled by overstrained generosity or exaggerated tenderness. Fierce, merciless to himself and others, utterly unbending and unforgiving—yes ; wilfully false, disloyal, ungenerous—never !’ And Penrith himself answered : ‘ It may well have been as you say. I can guess or understand all, I can venture to blame him for nothing, but that he should have spoken to Alice—when——.’ I heard no more ; but I had heard enough. Others—men knowing you and your story—men so sternly honourable as Sir Philip Vane, so coldly high-minded as my own guardian, could hold you almost blameless where I would listen to no excuse ; could recognize generosity and loyalty to another, where my pride would see only the affront to itself, and judged that beyond possibility of pardon. You used so to overrate me—do you yet think well enough of me to understand, to believe how it shames me that *I* should have been the one to wrong you ; that I, who should have trusted to the last, whose faith in you should have withstood all but absolute proof, was the first to condemn, the least believing, the most bitter ; that I, whose love once promised should have pleaded for you against others’ harshness, made my resentment the barrier between you and those who were more worthy of you ? I felt then the justice of the reproach I had seen so often in Amy’s eyes, though she would never speak it. I had no answer when, some hours later, Louisa Vane almost told me, in so many words, that she could read the riddle of the conduct they could

not explain; that I could furnish the justification of which no suffering, no unjust reproach, could wring a hint from you. They all believed in you—and yet none knew, and Amy will not let me tell, how I drew you on, almost forced you, to speak what had I been less forward you would have withheld. It is just that I should have to write this confession of my fault; should humble myself to own that I repent my conduct to you. I deserve the humiliation:—but, Lionel, you are proud enough to know what such humiliation is, generous enough to feel for me, and to accept this as a sufficient atonement to the pride I wounded so deeply. You would not have me say more; and if *then* you spoke to spare my feelings, you will spare them now? If my repentance be too late; if you too have repented, or if you cannot forgive—then pray, pray read no further; destroy this at once, and only let Amy tell me that it has reached you.

“But—one who was by your side told me of a lady’s scarf you wore when every moment might be your last. I recognized you in that—and it seemed the same you took from my hand on the *Europa*. If that scarf were mine, if you wore it because—the giver was still dear to you—do not let me forfeit your esteem by what may seem too like a renewal of my former error. When we last met, I spoke because I thought that my fortune kept you silent: I cannot bear that the memory of my pride and mistrust should part us now. You will not misunderstand me; if till now you were willingly silent, be silent still. Only if you still feel as I thought you felt that last afternoon, do not let doubt of me, the

recollection of my want of faith in you, disturb you ; above all, do not be troubled by the thought that there are still things you cannot or will not explain. I care to know nothing but—what your answer or your silence must tell. I know you will not deceive me by word or act ; you will let me do nothing that, if I knew all, would put me in the wrong before God or my conscience. I want no other assurance. Do not fancy that I shall ever distrust you again ; ever vex you with mean or unworthy thoughts. It was not that I felt” [two or three half-finished sentences were here erased] —“but I cannot explain the past ; I can only bid you trust me in future. If I would not ask you to leave your adopted country or to give up the cause in which—how strange it seems ! but you know that your cause must be mine—you have engaged, still less [could I wish you to resign the charge it was so like you to undertake. You could hardly reproach me more severely than by thinking such a sacrifice necessary or desirable. Amy, I believe, writes to urge you to send your wards to her care. You will not think that I consent to that request ? If you can bid me come to you in the home you cannot now leave—surely there can be no cause ? . . . If you receive this letter not as an act of unmaidenly forwardness, but as the strongest proof of womanly trust that a maiden could give, you will not refuse me that proof that you trust me as wholly as I trust you ? You will not think that those who owe safety and happiness to you will be less secure, less happy because—if—I share your charge ? . . . There are words I may not use till you give me the

right; but, if this letter seem cold or unkind, is not all I could say, I am afraid much more than I ought to say, told by my writing at all? I could not do it, if you had not said and done so much, or if I had not requited you so ill. In any case, forgive me, and try not to condemn.—A. K.”

CHAPTER X.

PARTING.

“Enough, we parted: why recal
The scene of anguish known to all?”

LORD PENRITH'S letter, kindly, a little satirical perhaps upon his kinsman's perverse distrust, scarcely referred to Alice; but it confirmed and enforced the offer mentioned in her letter, set forth and urged at length, with perhaps unnecessary earnestness of reasoning and entreaty, by Amy. But for the restoration of his hopes of Alice, or rather the permission now given to entertain a hope he had never felt before, compliance with Amy's counsel must have been intensely painful. It could not now be yielded without a keen pang; but it was too clear and obvious a duty to admit of hesitation. A happy, a safe, an honourable home once offered them, in a society where their extraction would neither be known nor if known seriously affect them, under a protection that would silence absolutely all offensive whispers or questions respecting their past or their relation to himself, it would have been no less than selfish deliberate injustice to his wards to palter or refuse. And now—war raging round them, threat-

ening, though as yet but remotely, even the home he had been able to give them—had there been no reason, no obligation to part them from himself, he would have embraced with eagerness, no matter how terrible the wrench to his own heart-strings, the proffer of a secure asylum.

“I am to lose you, Florence,” he said, after more than an hour’s silence, endeavouring to speak lightly and as if more pleased with the prospect than he could really feel. “Nay, it is ungracious and ungrateful to put it in that way. At last an opportunity of repairing, I hope almost entirely, the cruel wrong you suffered at first from the law, the injury my selfish heedlessness, my lingering reluctance to part with you has since done you, is—I cannot say given, but—absolutely forced upon me. I can give you the home that of all others in the world I should have chosen for you; where no possible event can threaten your freedom, where neither your legal misfortune nor the chance of birth will be known, or would, however fully known, do aught but excite greater sympathy and interest for you with all you may meet. See, Florence, I can show you this part of my sister’s letter—do not read beyond. “Not”—he added, noticing but not understanding the very painful blushes that covered her cheek, the manifest embarrassment and reluctance of her manner—“that there is anything in it that could hurt you on your own account; but there are sentences which I deserve, but which might wound your exaggerated consideration for me.”

The handwriting, exquisitely feminine and much

smaller, yet bore in its clearness, its firmness, and the distinct formation of every letter, with the utter absence of the flourishes of female or clerkly affectation, a striking resemblance to his own. The passage, commencing with the second sheet and continuing to the end of its third page, committed to Florence's hands, read as follows :—

Amy to Lionel.

“ . . . This makes it easier to urge a request which I fear must give you pain, even if it bring you comfort. You would as soon flinch from a post of danger as from a painful duty ; and you must see that I am acting a sister's part in earnestly pressing you to send to us at once those cherished wards of whom Sir Philip speaks with such cordial admiration, and Lady Vane with sincerest heartfelt sympathy. Lion, you cannot, you must not hesitate. Of course the parting must grieve you. But it shall give you no pain, no uneasiness that Penrith or I can spare you. Pray understand that the request is his as much as mine ; that he agrees with and approves every word I write, and will keep my promises as his own. We shall recognize, as they will necessarily feel, that while entrusted to us the young ladies are your charge, your wards. Need I assure you that in every point they shall be dealt with as you direct, or as you would wish ; that I will never forget from what care I took them, or give them reason to regret it ; that those who are dear to you by right of all you have done for them shall be dear to me for your sake as for their own ; that if they ever seem to need

indulgence, I will remember who has spoilt them? You cannot doubt how deeply their story has interested us in them. Remember too that if it were known here—which of course it will not be unless you wish it—it would only make them objects of general interest and consideration in English society. You will feel how great are the advantages, as regards the social introduction of the elder and the education of the younger pair, which London or Ulswater offer as compared with Minnaroo.

“But you will not frighten the latter—remembering what you said of their sisters at the same age, I must not call them children—with the idea of an English school? I do not ask you to trust them to any hands but my own. Surely you will content yourself and them with your Amy’s assurance that she will neglect nothing to make their girlhood as happy as you made hers? In the charming friends of your last pleasant days in India, before the horrors of the Mutiny, I cannot expect strangers, but companions with whom I shall feel as much at home as ‘I give you my promise’ to make *them*. Lionel, you will not show that you doubt the pledge you taught me to hold inviolable, unquestionable: ‘Woman’s faith as manhood’s word’? You cannot, you will not hesitate for a moment to commit to my care those for whom you have now done all that a man can do?”

It was not till, after she had had ample time to read it thrice over, he turned and looked with some surprise towards her, that Florence, startled into consciousness, folded and returned the paper.

“ Well,” he said, “ could we wish for anything better, anything more perfectly satisfactory, Florence ? I am sorry that there will be a certain danger, a certain difficulty, no doubt ; but on board a blockade-runner chased by a Federal cruiser you will scarcely run more risk than here ; and in the worst case, should you fall into the enemy’s hands, you see that all the influence of our—I mean, Her Majesty’s—ambassador would be used, if necessary, to secure your immediate release and remission to England. You don’t know Amy ; but you will find the refuge offered you in her personal kindness not less satisfactory, not less all we could wish, than in every other respect. Is it that you fear to reproach me, in acknowledging what we both owe to another who has repaired my omission ? Is it that you would not pain me by owning how glad you will be to find yourself and your sisters in safer, more appropriate care ? ”

Her silence, her evident embarrassment, something which looked like reluctance or trouble rather than satisfaction in her attitude, and in such symptoms of feeling as instinct can gather from the manner of those we know well even when their countenances are turned from us, perplexed and surprised him ; and he was neither relieved nor enlightened by the constrained words and tone in which at last she forced herself to answer.

“ Lady Penrith is very, very kind. I understand better, now, how you love the sister who is willing to take so much trouble, to promise so much in order to set your mind at rest, and take on herself such an anxious and inconvenient charge. And yet,” she

faltered, either unwilling to speak her mind clearly, or, more probably, not fully conscious what her own feelings were, "she writes as if—as if you would not like it, or she were forcing something upon you. Is it only that she thinks you will be afraid for us? Or that——"

She did not finish her sentence, but he had little difficulty in concluding it for her.

"That I am selfishly grieved at what I ought to have endeavoured to make, as I hope I am thankful that it has been made, possible? Of course it pains me to part with you. Equally of course I should have wished it under any circumstances for your sakes; and in our present perils it is not merely a duty but a relief."

"But if you don't like it," she asked, speaking low and with downcast eyes, "why should you do it? You are master; and only English people could expect you to give up what cost you so much, if you cared to keep it. Remember what I have always said; we whose fathers made the law could have no right to complain, however strictly the law were enforced against us. And," she added earnestly, in a firmer, clearer tone, "setting the law aside, you have earned by your kindness a right which even you need not scruple to exercise."

"And which," he answered, "I should cancel, should convert into a cruel wrong, if I were to doubt for a moment. Here, Florence, it has always seemed—perhaps I have always chosen to think it—doubtful whether I could do better for you than I have done. In England there is no question whatever. The very

best thing that could be placed within my reach for you is exactly what Amy offers. I ought not perhaps to let you know how much selfish regret I feel at what must be altogether pleasant to you."

"Pleasant!" she exclaimed, almost bitterly. "Do you think so ill of us? Do you think us so utterly ungrateful?"

"I have lived these last four years in your kindness, Florence. Don't talk of gratitude; my service to you cost me little, and I owe my life to your care, but don't let us reckon what each has done or given. I *don't* think you have been so unhappy in my care that you will not feel sorry for a while to leave your home, or even to put four thousand miles between us. But I have seen for a long time that, whatever might be the case with your sisters, *you* would never be at ease or happy in the South. In England you will easily forget what there, as Amy says, would tell rather in your favour."

"And you," said Florence, "we should leave you—no—no, surely not till you are well? How could I tell your sister that you were left alone as you are now?"

"Not quite alone; though no other care can be what yours has been. But don't let us discuss the matter now; I shall see my way presently. Only you will have to start very soon and very suddenly. Now, will you give me my writing materials, and send Afzul here while you tell your sisters of their good fortune."

She rose, but lingered for some moments beside him after she had given him the pencil and the spring-

clasped board that held the paper, enabling him to write in his recumbent posture. He looked up at last, and saw in her eyes the tears he could hardly keep back from his own.

“Thank you,” he said, pressing her hand to his lips, “I understand. Go now, dear Florence; this tries me more than I can bear.”

It was perhaps rather for selfish reasons than from mere consideration for her, that from all the discussions necessary before the journey could be finally arranged Florence was studiously excluded; that she heard nothing till the arrangements, so far as they were independent of her own and her sisters' simple preparations, were complete. General Aspeden was anxious that his wife and daughters should no longer be exposed to the dangers which, though now a prisoner, he saw gathering daily closer around them. The young orphan rescued from the ashes of her home was committed to their care; it being easy for Colonel d'Ultramar, the main part of whose fortune consisted of his English estates, to provide for her without, at any rate for the present, communicating to her the arrangements for that purpose made with Mrs. Aspeden. The four sisters were to accompany the latter; and she to whose maternal kindness they were committed promised in no case to part with them, till she should herself deliver them into the care of Lord or Lady Penrith, or at least of some one deputed by them to receive their guests on landing in England. Nor even when all was arranged, could Lionel make up his mind personally to announce the fact to the precious charge he resigned with such painful loyalty.

This task he left to Eugenie, whose frank outbursts of grief and affection were easier to bear than her sister's quieter and deeper emotion. A small escort drawn from his own regiment, quartered at no great distance, was to protect the party till on board the river steamer, which would land them safely on the eastern bank at a point still firmly held by the Confederates. Those detailed for this duty were quartered in and about the house and outbuildings on the last night; and their officers, with two or three gentlemen privates, joined the party in the drawing-room. The talk was for the most part broken, subdued in spirit, and carried on in a somewhat low tone. Some remarks on the state of English sympathies gave Florence an opportunity of addressing a question to Mr. Delarue; who, like thousands of other men of years equally grave and profession equally pacific, had taken arms in this desperate peril of his country, and commanded a troop or company of the Lancers.

“Do you not think that Mr. Carlyle's definition of slaves as ‘servants hired for life’ is a sound argument in our favour?”

“Yes,” replied the lawyer, entering somewhat more eagerly than might have been expected into the vindication thus suggested. “They say we pay our slaves no wages. We feed them and clothe them for fifteen or sixteen years before they are of any use, for many years in age during which they are a burden; and as they cost us more in proportion to their work than free labourers would, we can hardly be accused of wronging them in that way.”

“And,” said Florence, “are not English labourers

and servants liable to starve when they can work no longer ? ”

She did not seem to take profound interest in the somewhat long and declamatory answer which contrasted the old age of a slave with that of an English pauper ; but said when he concluded—

“ Then a master has no right, no power to part with his slaves except by sale ? He cannot cast them off by law, any more than in fact, because they are useless or he is tired of them ? ”

“ Certainly not ; I should have thought you knew that as well as I.”

“ I knew it was never done ; but I was not sure whether the slave had any legal right.”

“ But you know, Miss Dupont, that a master cannot even emancipate his slaves without making provision for them.”

“ And has he,” asked Florence, “ a right to emancipate them against their own will ? ”

“ I don’t quite see,” rejoined the lawyer, pondering this curious problem, with no idea that it could have any other than a purely technical interest, “ how a slave could have a legal will till he was emancipated ; but I should say, no.”

Mrs. Aspeden, who took on herself such of the duties of hostess as she could perform without appearing to usurp the place that Florence was only too willing to abandon, now suggested, first to her daughters and afterwards to others, a resort to music, as the best means of relieving the sadness that made conversation all but impossible to many of the intending exiles. Sweet as her voice was, Florence was care.

fully sheltered by the same considerate kindness from a demand to which she was manifestly unequal. One little piece in praise of the various State troops that had at first composed the victorious Army of Northern Virginia was sung by male and female voices combined :—

“ As granite cliffs, spray-spattered,
 The tempest-surges mock,
 So, by the war-storm battered,
 Stands firm our earth-fast rock :
 As by the lion scattered
 Huddles the hornèd flock,
 Recoils the invader, shattered
 By Alabama’s shock.
 Hark to the rifle’s rattle,
 The cannon’s roaring mouth !
 Arise, Lord God of Battle,
 Defend, avenge the South !

“ Wave after wave they dash on
 Virginia’s stonewall line :
 Firm, in old English fashion,
 Stands Georgia’s mountain-pine ;
 The cannon-lightnings flash on,
 The gleaming sabres shine,
 Where Carolinian passion
 And Creole fire combine.
 Hark to the rifle’s rattle,
 The cannon’s roaring mouth !
 Arise, Lord God of Battle,
 Defend, avenge the South !

“ Where on our front converging
 Swept down the storm of shell,
 There onward, onward surging,
 The Tennesseans fell.
 Where longest, sharpest, quickest,
 Pelted the hail of lead,
 There rank on rank the thickest
 Lie Mississippi’s dead.
 Hark to the rifle’s rattle,
 The cannon’s roaring mouth !
 Arise, Lord God of Battle,
 Defend, avenge the South !

"Squares shivered, squadrons sundered,
 The battle's corpse-piled marge,
 Mark through the midst where thundered
 The Texans' reckless charge.
 Grey veterans growled and wondered,
 And cursed the lore of years,
 As on to victory blundered
 Our beardless volunteers.

Hark to the rifle's rattle,
 The cannon's roaring mouth!
 Arise, Lord God of Battle,
 Defend, avenge the South!"

Afterwards Delarue called on some half-dozen of his comrades to give in chorus a spirited, however rough, bivouac song then in much favour. It was a species of satiric parody, not more unfair than those which Mr. Lowell has not shamed to reprint since the war, put into the mouths of Federal soldiery alarmed, as for a long time the army of the Potomac was ever alarmed, by the reported approach of the most famous of the Confederate leaders.

"John Brown in earth is moulderin', his soul is marchin' on;
 And we, our rifles shoulderin', when all our foes are gone,
 We foller, lick 'em holler—What's that? by George, a gun!
 Stonewall Jackson's comin', boys! dash that finin' drummin' noise,
 We're only three to one! Stonewall Jackson's comin', boys! run
 away, boys, run.

Run, boys, run! Cut away like fun!
 Stonewall Jackson's comin', boys! run, boys, run!

"They say he's short of rations, so he's lookin' up Nat Banks:—
 Bad luck for us! Tarnation, keep silence in the ranks!
 Lord help the Commissary! *—Warn't yon the Rebel yell?
 That's the shout to skeer us, boys! hist! the Rebs'll hear us, boys!
 'Tain't the time to swell! Stonewall Jackson's near us, boys; won't
 he give us ——?

Run, boys, run! there's another gun!
 Stonewall Jackson's comin', boys! run, boys, run!

* Banks was so called from the quantity and value of the supplies taken from him by the destitute Confederates.

“ Skedaddle, boys, skedaddle! There goes our braggart Pope,
 Whipped out o’ coat and saddle, runnin’ like Johnny Cope!
 He can’t ha’ failed his promise—it’s we’ve mistook the front—
 Run and we’ll receive him, boys! run, we mustn’t grieve him, boys;
 Pope must bear the brunt. ’Twarn’t perlite to leave him, boys—
 guess the Rebels wun’t.
 Run, boys, run! every mother’s son!
 Stonewall Jackson’s comin’, boys! run, boys, run!

“ Hark! closer comes the yellin’—run for your lives, boys, run!
 Pelham our rear is shellin’: there’s Ashby, horse and gun.
 John Pope can’t seem to see it—unless he’s eyes behind!
 Stonewall Jackson’s comin’, boys: guess we’ll pay for bummin’,*
 boys!
 Cut away like wind! Hark! the bullets hummin’, boys; run,
 boys, go it blind!
 Run, boys, run! fling off pack and gun!
 Stonewall Jackson’s comin’, boys! run, boys, run!”

The inspiring strains, given with hearty sarcastic emphasis, a little enlivened the party, and only Mrs. Aspeden noticed, when the chorus of laughter and applause subsided, that Florence had disappeared.

“ Poor child!” she thought. “ No doubt where she has gone. I don’t wonder. But if she were not leaving so soon I should fear: and yet no harm might come. I don’t think he shares our caste feeling; and, *that* forgotten, even he might well be proud and fond of such a wife.”

Her sisters’ leave had been taken earlier in the evening; though at parting Eugenie and Eva had asked permission to see their guardian for one moment before starting, promising not to wake him should he be then asleep.

“ That is not likely,” he said. “ I don’t think I shall sleep much to-night. Nay,” as he noticed a

* “ Bummers”—the straggling robbers and incendiaries that accompanied the march of Sherman, Sheridan, etc.

sadder, more wistful expression than he had seen before in Eva's sweet blue eyes, "I have left much of my writing to the last, and I have two letters which Florence must deliver. Don't let *her* come in the morning, if you can help it, Eva, without hurting her; and——" He paused for a moment, and then, when the last embrace had been given in tearful silence, with sisterly warmth and frankness, with as much of simple affection as of well-earned gratitude, he singled out and detained Eugenie for one minute.

"I suppose you can be silent, dear; and I can give you a message which would hurt Eva too much. The rest of you will forget more easily, if you hear what—— Come, Eugenie! you know you and I have both had that probability in view for a year past, at least. *Then*—don't cry so, child, or I can't speak!—*then* say another good-bye to Florence for me; I shall remember her, I know, at the last."

No one but Eva saw Florence that evening after the parting interview; nor would Lionel allow even Afzul, who was to see the sisters actually embarked at Mobile on board one of the most successful blockade-runners, to remain with him. The devoted servant and trusty soldier remained close, erect as a sentinel on duty, outside the door during the whole night, listening for the slightest sound that might summon or require his presence. But many weeks afterwards, in England, the traces of tears were perceptible on the letters written during that night and the preceding day, when opened by those to whom they were addressed; on those passages especially which commended the young Creoles, and Florence above all, to the protecting

care of Amy, the friendship and sympathy of Alice Kavanagh.

Lionel to Lord Penrith.

“ . . . I have told Miss Kavanagh that she must be bound by no engagement. I mean it. Pray take care that no shadow of obligation rests on her—above all that nothing is known to others. While the war lasts it would be a sin, a cruelty to claim her; and you need not be told how wrong it would be to bind her to await its end. But there is more; much that I could not write to her, and you must do her justice. Therefore I must put plainly before you what neither she nor Amy should be told. This is no case of the ordinary hazards of war. The Southerners grow desperate as the North grows stubborn. We shall fight, not while there is hope, but while the South has strength to stand. We shall be killed down, not beaten. I don't think half of us will survive defeat; and the very few whose judgment I trust—keep this strictly secret—since Vicksburg has fallen, evidently expect defeat. If the North, wasting the waste manhood of Europe without scruple, choose to persist while giving two lives for one, they must wear us out. And this is not all. Our officers, from Lee and the Johnstones down to the youngest lieutenant, are recklessly prodigal of their lives; and in this lies, I think, the secret of that superior quality but for which our troops must ere this have been simply crushed by numbers. In our last battle my own regiment was almost annihilated. But before that our loss had been terrible. My men, seasoned desperadoes or high-

spirited youths of family, needed less leading if more control than almost any, the Virginians perhaps excepted. Yet—*we* mustered eight hundred lances and thirty officers when we first took the field. A month ago there were seven hundred and sixty men with the colours—of whom three hundred and twenty were recruits. Of the officers, *nine* only had held commissions at Manassas, and of these four had been so wounded that I never expected to see them again. Of the twenty-one missing, two are prisoners, three crippled for life, the rest . . . You will see that the position of Confederate officers is that of *enfants perdus*, and you will understand what is due to your niece. I ought not perhaps to avail myself of this opportunity to interest her in my fate; but not to avow my love when I learnt at last that I might hope for her pardon—that was a height of sacrifice I could not reach. . . .”

These last words brought a half-smile to Lord Penrith's countenance, which had been very grave and sad when he read the earlier part of the letter. “I begin to understand Amy's feeling about him,” he said to himself. “Is it that he can't or won't see that he is quite as much to Alice as she to him; that all ‘sacrifices’ cost her at least as much? Or am I not to guess how much more than pardon she implied, if she did not write it?—or both? Well—if women were all that he fancies them, or the best of us approached to Amy's ideal *me*, romance would not be folly, nor marriage disenchantment.”

CHAPTER XI.

A FEVER-DREAM.

“Then with both her hands enfolding both of his she softly told him, ‘Bertram, if I say I love thee, ’tis the Vision only speaks.’”

LATE the next evening Lionel lay in a restless, painful slumber, enforced by an opiate administered by the surgeon; who had learned from Afzul at the last moment that his patient had not slept during the preceding night, and that after the very brief parting interview with his three younger wards in the morning he had been, as the loyal delicacy of the Arab phrased it, “very ill.” What he ascribed to mental rather than physical suffering, what he knew his master would never willingly have betrayed, nothing could induce him to reveal. The lamp was turned very low, but any one who could have looked on the patient’s face might have seen that the slumber was unnatural, and visited though not broken by a sort of strange restless movement, more than is common under the influence of the most vivid dreams. Even his occasional murmurings were unusually intelligible, had there been any one to hear them. It was the sleep or trance of one on the verge of delirium; a sleep haunted with the consciousness

of place and time, and of many of those recent incidents which had most impressed the waking mind.

“Hardly like Florence,” he murmured, “and yet I thought——”

He woke with a violent start—that kind of sudden terrified start with which sick men wake from such a slumber, when the force of the opiate is not exhausted but broken by loud sound or rough touch; and yet there was neither sound nor touch nor movement to arouse him. Probably the quick, instinctive sense of the soldier who had lived for so many months in incessant peril—sleeping often almost within the enemy’s lines, and where at any rate his own life and that of all around him depended on the extremest vigilance of their sentries, and their own readiness to start to lance and saddle at a moment’s warning—suggested an unexpected and therefore alarming presence. Almost involuntarily his hand sought the place where in the camp his sword would have lain, and failing to find it groped around, scarcely aided by the eye, till it met and grasped a light switch that happened to rest against the head of the couch. Then he turned and looked in the direction where the light of the lamp, placed within reach of his hand, would fall on the chair usually occupied by nurse or watcher. He started violently as fancy or fact presented to his eyes what seemed a feminine figure, too young and slight for the only lady left in the house, who had occupied that seat when he fell asleep; too delicate, refined, and elegant in form, dress, and carriage for housekeeper or servant. In another moment, even by

the dim light, it assumed a familiar character; each detail realized more and more distinctly by actual sight or intensely impressed imagination. There was the white dress, low and sleeveless when fashioned years ago for a young girl's appearance at her first ball; now adapted to ordinary evening wear, since he had admired it, by the addition of a black scarf that hid the neck and shoulders, and by such other alterations as feminine taste and skill can always furnish at need. He seemed to recognize the black sash, the black and white ribbons and lace in the hair that prolonged the orphan's mourning; the peculiar drooping attitude, so well remembered whenever a hinted or fancied reproof or self-reproach oppressed a too sensitive spirit—an attitude so sad and yet so graceful; the slight figure, the long slender limbs that gave all the elegance of stature to one actually below the average height of woman; the exquisite shape of the small head, that ever seemed almost overloaded with its luxuriance of dark curling tresses; the tiny half-hidden ears, the perfect curves of the form, the fine rather small features, the large dark eyes; the lips in whose riper, fuller beauty alone there was a scarcely visible trace of another parentage than that which had bestowed the signal delicacy of every other detail of that long familiar loveliness. Could fancy so mould any other living form? Was it that melancholy or brooding, mental or physical fever, had called out of nothing an actual illusion of the sense? He closed his eyes as long as he could bear to do so, and looked again. The apparition was no less distinct than at first. Could opium produce so marvellous a

waking dream? Or was reason giving way under the effects of pain, exhaustion, overstrained nerves, restless nights and anxious days? If the fever of wounds or malaria had so gained on him, him whose imagination had never before under any circumstances so deceived him—surely neither mind nor life could long endure. Too well informed for the superstitions equally incident to ignorant religion or ill-grounded unbelief, his first terror was almost unnaturally logical; logical perhaps with that strange lucidity which sometimes accompanies the nerve-quelling effects of opium.

“Am I going mad? Am I delirious?” he muttered. Then:—“If you are a real woman, speak at once and say who you are, for I am bewildered by some strange illusion. Silent still,” he thought, “and still there. Then it is an apparition. They are all gone, I know; I did not dream *that*. I remember everything too well. *Their* frank sorrow and sisterly affection, *her* tears, her wistful looks and words meaning something she would not say, I could not understand—I remember all that clearly. What can this be? Yes, and it moves too, slightly; it seems to breathe. Good Heaven! I can bear it no more!” He struggled in vain against the mere nervous terror that was gradually overpowering alike his reason and his courage; both shaken by long suffering and the near approach of delirium. “Take care,” he cried at last, sharply. “If you be real, if you be a woman, go, send Afzul here” (forgetting the man’s absence). “I tell you it is not safe; my mind is going, and I cannot trust myself. Speak, or go, in God’s name! . . . It is her figure, her face,” he

murmured, half aloud. "Can harm have come to her? Nonsense!—and yet—Florence!"

It was a cry more of horror than even of amazement. The long persistence of such an apparition might have driven to frenzy a man in health and vigour, equally convinced that its reality was impossible. He half sprang up, turning the lamp to its full brightness, and was the only more appalled when the Vision rose and approached; but so slowly, so noiselessly that to his excited senses it seemed to glide not walk, and to glide without sound of footfall or rustling of robes. Half in the anger of extreme terror, half in the mere physical instinct of self-defence—so deeply rooted in manhood that man's first impulse is to strike at danger, however aware of his impotence, whether against a lion or a spectre—he lifted the switch and struck the figure sharply across the shoulders. With more horror and consternation than if the blow had passed through unresisting air, he felt it meet the resistance of a material form; heard a faint, half-suppressed scream of pain, a cry unquestionably human and feminine. The nervous force that had for a moment strung his wasted frame at once deserted him, and he fell back powerless.

"Forgive me," he gasped. "How could I? . . . But I thought you an illusion. I warned you; I bade you go. Why would you not speak? And who, what are you?"

The movement, arrested for an instant, continued; the figure still approached, but with arms extended and head bent as in supplication, or deprecating anger or surprise. Still incredulous and bewildered, he saw

it kneel close beside him, saw the hands outstretched to reach his own. The clasp laid upon these was warm and soft; the clasp of living flesh and blood. The crimson cheeks, the parted lips with their half-smile, the dark pleading eyes, the tears that moistened their fringe, enforced their reality on his sense before the low, eager, faltering tones reached his ear.

“Forgive me, forgive me, Monseigneur! I *could* not leave you, and leave you so ill, helpless, alone. Could you expect it of me? Could you think so meanly of me, you who would not have forsaken us in pain or peril, if it had cost your life?”

“Florence! Florence! My God! what *have* you done?”

She understood the tone, the feeling, if she did not realize the meaning of that cry. It was grief, fear for her, and for her alone. If there mingled in it the slightest note of displeasure, it was for her own sake that he was vexed with her.

“You meant kindness, and I have disappointed you. But could you really think it was kind to me; could you not feel it must break my heart to be driven from you, and when you needed me? What must you think me, if anything that could be offered me elsewhere could make me desert you? And you told me I must be glad! How could you? That was harder, more cruel than when you believed that letter; and you had no cause now. If I could have gone, it would have been because I must be so hateful a burden to you, if you held me so selfish, so thankless. But you would not let me feel so. You made me know how sorry you were.”

Overpowered, in his utter weakness of mind and body, by the vehemence and passion of her outbreak, he interrupted her here.

“God forgive me! I ought never to have let you know that.”

“What! would you have made all the past, all your kindness, all your tenderness for me even more than the rest, a memory of pain and shame? Would you have had me believe it a weary unwelcome task, with no touch of feeling in it but pity? But all that is done; I am here, and I will not go. You cannot deny my right, now you have exercised yours. See,” flinging aside the scarf and revealing her soft rounded shoulders, the red bar of the whip-stroke cruelly distinct on the delicate white skin, “you have written your title there.”

She was sorry for this half-earnest appeal, as she felt in his look and tone much more than the natural pity and self-reproach of manhood for physical injury done, however unwittingly, to one so fair and fragile. The very sight of the crimson mark left by his own hand inspired all the horror and shame with which a gentleman trained in European conventions—much more one with whom profound reverence for the code of chivalric honour and courtesy was at once an hereditary instinct and a personal passion—regarded as the lowest depth of disgrace, the fact of striking a woman.

“What can I say, what can I do, when you reproach me with that? You know I could not, had I thought you a woman at all. You know I struck in the impulse of horror at what I took for an illusion of my own fevered brain. You know——”

“I know, Monseigneur, you would not have hurt even the vision of Florence, if you had thought it could be hurt! But I am glad you did it; it was my fault. If you had fired instead of striking, no one but I would have been to blame. I did not expect the blow; but if it had occurred to me, I would still have let you do it.”

“What do you mean, except to reproach me? Are you falling back into those old superstitious fancies, fears I thought—you promised me—we had done with?”

“No, no; but you seem—you may call it superstition again, perhaps it is; but, not meaning it, you have accepted what I meant, what made my right to come back. Because you never would remember it, because it has only made you more considerate, more generous, made you treat me more like a princess than the friend and ward you called me—do you think I have forgotten? Was it not too hard, was it possible? If it were only for all we owe you, and I above all, how could I leave you when you needed my care—do not think it presumptuous—almost as much as we needed the care you have given us so long? But I suppose it was your right to decide—it would have been your ward’s duty to obey, though I don’t know how I could. But—is my duty to you less clear, less binding, do I owe you less the loyalty, the care, if need be the self-sacrifice—because you never would acknowledge, would have tried to prevent my remembering, what your claim and my duty really were? No! you have not the right to cast off—your slave. She has a right to do all she can for you, who have made

slavery better, safer, happier for her, for us all, than freedom could well have been. Indeed, indeed I will be no burden, no charge to you now ! I want, I could accept no more the delicate considerate kindness that would not allow me to be what law, and a right we at least could not dispute, had made me. You will let me nurse you, care for you, watch over you till you are well—till you can, if you must, go back, take your part once more in this dreadful war ; and then you need not, you shall not trouble yourself further for me than for the rest of those who belong to you no more and no less than I.”

Florence had not observed, while she poured forth her passionate pleading, its effect upon the invalid. Looking earnestly into his eyes for the condemnation she feared, the pardon rather than approval she scarcely ventured to hope, she thought of, observed only their expression ; and did not see even there the evidences of exhaustion both of mind and body, of fading coherence of thought, of the returning effect of the opiate, the overpowering influence of fever, which at another moment she would have been the first to observe, and whose significance she would not have underrated. He himself was conscious how little self-possession, how little control of his own thought or feeling was left to him ; but he struggled earnestly to preserve command of mind, words and manner long enough to soothe her agitation, to relieve her anxiety ; to protect the self-respect which, as yet hardly startled into consciousness by her own act, might be fatally, cruelly, irreparably wounded by any error, especially by any want either of tenderness or of accustomed respect, on his part.

“Do you think,” he said, speaking with an effort physical and mental of which she was wholly unaware, but which made her conscious of something strange and changed in his tone, “do you think I can mistake your motive or be ungrateful for your self-sacrifice? I wish you had not done it, Florence. You cannot see, I hope you never will see, what a mistake you have made. But can you so wrong me as to think that I honour or respect you less because you could not, would not leave in sickness and helplessness one who has at least tried, wished to be a true and loyal friend to you? For my sake, if not for your own, drop now from your thoughts as well as from your speech the word, the idea I have tried, and almost hoped I had been able, to make you forget. Of course you are more sacred, more precious to me than ever, because you have forgotten yourself in your care for me; and”—he hesitated, partly in confusion of mind, partly with a dim consciousness that the promise he was about to make might not be easy of fulfilment, might depend on the will of others who would too probably judge Florence’s impetuous self-devotion less gently and less justly than himself—“it shall not be my fault if you have cause to repent; if you have sacrificed more than immediate release and security from the dangers that hang about you here.”

“No, no, Monseigneur!” Florence rejoined, endeavouring to give to the title something of the formal meaning it had wholly lost on her lips and her sisters’, for whom it had been, in so far as their respective age, position, and relations would admit, something more like a sisterly pet-name. “After disappointing

your kindness, disobeying your wishes, I cannot let you feel, let others say—I cannot be made to feel myself—that I have forced myself back into a position to which I had no right ; that I have burdened you with the continuance of the care you have shown me hitherto, whether you will or no. Say or show—yes, if you show it only by str—by touching me as you did just now—that you accept my return as an act of loyal service and duty, not——” Her voice failed her, but the earnest entreaty in her eyes, the tremulous clasp of her hands, avouched the sincerity of her strange pleading, and spoke perhaps more than words could have done. It was with no common effort that for a moment he regained sufficient clearness of perception and memory to think, what answer might best serve the one purpose his mind could now retain ; the generous anxiety to spare a young girl’s feelings, to save feminine pride from humiliation which, if not felt at the time, might be cruelly painful when recollection and reflection returned ;—to be all that was gentle, kind, affectionate to Florence, grateful for her affection even more than for the service it had prompted, and yet to retain unstained, unbroken, the loyalty to another which, in essence at least, he felt even then no temptation to violate.

“ I accept what you have done, dear child, in the spirit in which I know you have done it ;—as a friend’s, a sister’s kindness for one who has tried to treat you as a sister, but who certainly has owed at least as much to you as you can fancy you owe to him.”

There was still a painful expression of doubt,

timidity, expostulation, almost of shame, in the look that strove to read yet dared not meet his own. It might be a foolish—woman's harsh judgment, woman's jealousy could hardly have considered it an evil or sinful—impulse; Alice Kavanagh, had she known all, would never have thought it a disloyal one—that prompted him, instead of the stroke Florence had invited, to lay his feeble hand on the shoulders where the cruel bruise was still plainly visible to his failing sight, and, drawing her towards him, to touch with fevered lips her crimson cheek. The action pacified and did not startle or alarm her. Instinctively she felt that it spoke no warmer, no less pure or less reverent affection—perhaps something even less of tenderness, if not less of regardful desire to evince it—than his every word, look, and act had displayed during the long period of intimate daily intercourse when such a caress would have seemed simply impermissible to him and would have surprised, perhaps alarmed, perhaps offended her. When he released her, she still remained for some minutes kneeling beside the couch; her fear at least of his displeasure or disapproval, if not the doubt of herself that as yet she refused to recognize, soothed by the looks of gratitude and confidence that he continued to turn upon her after speech had become too great an effort; still more perhaps soothed and comforted by the expression of rest, the half-conscious sense of satisfaction and security, she thought to read in his countenance when, overpowered by exhaustion and sleep, he could no longer even by looks respond to her kindness as it deserved; till at last she saw that he had sunk into

a slumber more quiet and composed than that from which her presence had startled him. She did not note as anxiously as she would have done, at any time when her own feelings did not divert her attention from one for whom she cared infinitely more than for herself, the symptoms of increased and probably dangerous fever which, even in that sleep, might have been perceptible to a less experienced and ordinarily less vigilant nurse.

CHAPTER XII.

TROTH-PLIGHT.

“I could not love thee, dear, so well
Loved I not honour more.”

LORD PENRITH himself had met the party who landed at Southampton from the West Indian packet, to which the blockade-runner had safely transferred them. His return to London with her new charges was anxiously awaited by Amy; not less, perhaps more so by Alice Kavanagh, now her only companion, for Helen had been a year married, and was now with her husband, the representative of England at a minor German Court. Lady Penrith had not chosen to show to Alice the mysterious telegraphic message which had preceded the party by a couple of hours, and which she had fortunately received when alone.

“There is news you will not like. Not danger to your brother: don't show surprise or ask many questions till we are alone.”

Utterly unwilling to distrust her brother, but realizing, as her letter showed, the possible difficulties of his position—better aware than many sisters of the attraction his personal beauty, his manner, his military

fame, and, when better known, his character were likely to exert over other women, especially while very young—Amy had always felt a secret misgiving that some awkward inexplicable incident might yet occur to thwart her favourite hope of his union with the only woman she thought fully worthy of him; the only one she held capable of so thoroughly enthralling his heart as to keep it proof for the future against those charms which had ever cost the men of his house so dear, and had cost him once already more than he would willingly have paid for anything that any woman but one could give. She guessed the meaning of her husband's message at the first moment when, reaching with Alice the foot of the staircase as he led her guests into the hall, she saw but three, and knew intuitively and at once which was missing. Restraining, even beyond the rule imposed by Lord Penrith's message, her natural surprise and curiosity, she had led them to the rooms prepared for them—had seen her maid busied in attendance on Eugenie and Rose, and was about to lead Eva into the next chamber, intended for her and Florence, without asking a single question regarding the latter—when Eugenie shyly but earnestly interposed.

“Lady Penrith,” she said, “Florence gave me the letters that Monseigneur—Colonel d’Ultramar—had put in her charge. I did not know then what she meant, what she was going to do. But this was for you; that for Lord Penrith I have given him already, and this—I know Colonel d’Ultramar told her to give it into Miss Kavanagh’s own hand. Will you let me do so?”

Amy glanced from one to the other of the sisters, and saw at once in Eva's frightened manner, her drooping head and averted face, how painful and awkward any questioning *there* would be; while Eugenie's frank fearless look indicated a courage and decision which, despite embarrassment, could be relied on for a brief straightforward simple explanation, that would not miss the points on which alone explanation was really required; while there was the tact to spare both the absent and the present excuses or details that could only be distressing. She hesitated for a moment; but took her part at once when she saw through the half-open door that Alice already awaited. Eva in the room next her own, which had been assigned at her request to the two elder sisters.

"Yes, you shall give it her at once," she answered, leading her young guest forward. "Alice, Eugenie has a letter for you. I suspect it will not explain what we don't understand, but I will see you again in ten minutes."

As she spoke, Alice had taken, and, with an eagerness that all her self-command could not repress, had opened the letter. Its mere existence contradicted the terrible anticipation she had half formed from the fact of Florence's absence. Lionel could not have written to reject, would not have entrusted in so formal a manner to a stranger anything it could grieve or wound her to receive. The very first words were decisive, and all her alarms were forgotten in a feeling which, but for her own extreme anxiety and trouble, Amy would have been quicker to read.

"Don't distress yourself till then with doubts that after all——"

“Doubts!” Alice answered, in a low tone, but looking frankly and somewhat indignantly in her face, with a gaze that surprised and for the moment satisfied Amy—at least so far as concerned the character of her brother’s reply. That look came, no doubt, from the heart; and yet in the hand laid on that heart with an almost convulsive pressure, the sort of gasp that followed the word, Amy felt the presence of bitter pain, and probably of an anxiety to which her own was nowise to be compared. Leaving Eva alone with one to whom she felt for the present even that timid, shrinking, embarrassed guest might be safely trusted, one who would never show to Florence’s sister either a curiosity or a suspicion she would not own to herself, she turned back and closed the door; leaving Alice to repress with no common effort her eager longing to read all that had been written to her, to know all that had happened, till she had done the utmost that kindness as well as courtesy could suggest to set Eva at her ease. No hour in her life seemed half so long as the five minutes that elapsed before she could again turn to the letter she held in her trembling hand.

Lionel to Alice.

“Alice, my Alice! I no more hoped than I deserved that Heaven would ever be so good to me; that I should ever be allowed to call you mine indeed. And even now a great fear overshadows the intense joy and gratitude I feel. When I lost all, and felt only that I had lost you, and that no other loss was worth a regret in presence of that one—when passionate impatience to be as far as possible from the faces I

could never see again, and the country which had cast me out, drove me hither, just in time to save the girls—of whom I will only say that they are worthy to be your friends—I thought that in making me the instrument of their rescue Providence had forgiven me, and I thanked Him for all. But now that the price is returned me—is it strange that I am afraid?

“There is much in your letter that it gave me pain to read; nothing that is not true to the nature which ever seemed to me the ideal of perfect womanhood. In answer to your self-reproach I will only say—I deserved your condemnation infinitely better than I can ever hope to deserve your pardon; and if I thought that, had you known all I could not and cannot tell, you might have judged me less severely, I accepted your sentence as the only one that was possible to you. And, but for the evident fear that must have made the effort so painful, it would never have occurred to me that woman or man could think your forgiveness open to misconstruction. For myself, I have ever thought of maiden love, alike in its usual conventional reserve and its rare impulses of sacred frankness, in the words of the chivalrous legend which heraldic irony has assigned to the least chivalrous of nations: ‘*Honi soit qui mal y pense.*’ I wish I could ever hope to be worthy of the generosity that I once requited so ungenerously, and that can nevertheless resolve to give me another chance of happiness, a second opportunity of hope; but at least I am not so utterly lost as to wrong or misconceive it. If you could understand, Alice, what it is to have lost four years with you, out of a life so brief and a still briefer

youth, you would think me sufficiently punished by that irreparable, unforgotten loss for all in which I have really wronged, and all in which I must submit to seem to have wronged you. But in the present and the future, your forgiveness—let me write frankly, your love, my own Alice—has changed all for me; the world and my heart, life and death. Ten days ago, I was content to live, I dared not wish for death, because I feared for the helpless ones so strangely entrusted to my care;—now, life is more precious than words can tell, since to live means to regain you; and yet the worst bitterness of death is taken away, since I feel that I shall die regretted and forgiven.

“I could in no case accept your offer to spare me the pain of parting with those whom I *can* loyally and trustfully commend to your kindness in England. To no other woman could man write what I write fearlessly to you—love them because I love them; be kind to them because they have been so long my chief care, because it would make me restless and miserable to doubt that they were safe and happy. Florence especially I recommend to your friendship, because she has been so sacred a charge to me; because she deserves it, and because she will have need of all your indulgence, as well as of your support and encouragement. Hers must have been originally a sensitive, morbidly susceptible temperament; and the horrors of impending and the humiliation of actual slavery have tortured it into a condition that needs such watchful care and tenderness as you can give. *I* cannot come near enough to help or understand her; *you* can persuade her to be at ease with those who

will receive her from the first as a friend and equal—you will restore her to what she was when I first met her in India. The parting *is* painful, Alice, but I think I shall have most of the pain to myself; and once again in the field, it will be an inexpressible relief to feel that I can be spared: ‘strongest when we stand alone!’

“Florence, who shall give this into your own hand, will tell you that though in little danger, I am feverish from pain and sleeplessness—I am disabled, unfortunately, for the second time. This must plead my excuse if, in writing the small part of all I feel that I dare utter, my answer to a letter like yours be more passionate or less coherent than befits the reverence of the love I have ever borne you. Yes—did you not see, feel it, when I dared not own it?—almost from the hour of our first terrible meeting. I fear that it makes the conduct I cannot explain yet more utterly inexcusable; but, Alice, you will not withdraw your forgiveness because there has been no moment of these five years when you were not infinitely dearer to me than all the world besides—none when I would not have given everything but honour for a word or a smile from you, when I did not look up to you with a devotion that was rather worship than love. Did you never ask yourself what I must feel for her who took so calmly from my hand the terrible security of death at will; what a soldier thought of her whom he could trust confidently to that one safeguard? When my sword-arm fell useless to my side as the enemy swept over the summit of the breach at Kulwar, I had one moment to feel that life was over and that

all was lost. In that moment the worst pang of defeat was that it cost your life, the bitterest memory of the past your unspoken displeasure ; your pardoning expression of a hope that we might meet again, the one thought of a possible future. I can explain nothing, Alice. I can neither accept the exculpation which reflects on one who atoned too fearfully for errors that were hardly conscious, nor the excuse by which you take blame to yourself.

“Language could not tell what I renounce, in saying that we cannot meet till the war is over. You could not conceive—I dare not use the words that after all would fail to convey—what it would be to call you indeed my own, my bride ; to enjoy the fruition of your promise though but for a week—for a single day. If I must lose that—and as I write I know that I am probably losing it for ever—there is nothing in the treasure-house of Heaven that can compensate me. My darling ! my own ! if a lost soul suffers, in turning from the gates of Eternal Happiness, half what I suffer in refusing the present glimpse of Heaven on earth you offer me, the imagery of our preachers is feeble indeed beside the truth ! If my love for you were less—or if it were possible to love you as you are, and not to honour even more than love—I could not but bid you come to me, or come to you—to Europe—myself. For one month’s possession of you, I could and must renounce all—forsake my comrades, fail my country, desert my flag—but that I could not live to read my dishonour in your clear truthful eyes ; I could not offer you a tainted name. Nor can you come here. Terrible as the temptation is, I dare not yield

to my passionate craving to see you again—to the longing that exceeds a thousandfold the hunger of starving sailors, the dreadful thirst of wounded soldiers on our parched, burning battle-fields. Easier immeasurably to refuse water, as Sidney did, in that almost insane agony;—I have known it. But I have no choice. It would be the consummation of selfishness to sacrifice your whole life to the desire of a few days or weeks with you—that is all it could be; and yet that little ‘all’ is worth all else that Time or Eternity can have to offer! Since the fall of New Orleans, this unhappy State is no place for women. Were there no other reason, I should eagerly have embraced Amy’s offer, which takes from my heart a load almost as heavy as it bore at Kulwar. How could I bring you where I dare not let these remain?

“Alice, you must not feel yourself, you *are not* bound. But, darling, you will understand that on this subject I cannot bear to write—to you. Lord Penrith or Amy must do you justice—must urge what I cannot endure to remember.

“And now, I can only say that, till I return to duty, your letter will never leave me for a moment; that when I leave home again it shall be destroyed. It is very, very hard to promise this; but you would be hurt to think that other eyes might see it; and, whether left here or carried with me, an enemy may to-morrow be my heir. I must, I dare write no more, lest the fever which overmasters me should speak for me, and say—not more than I feel, but more than you could bear to read. You will not, you cannot doubt my love. Farewell: may we meet once again, at

least, were it only at the last, and in our dreams. My Alice, my darling, my adored! my good angel, my love for whom has been my safeguard from worse sins than even you could pardon—farewell!—my own! write if and when you can—*they* can tell you how—once more, dear Alice, farewell. For ever, as ever, yours—ULTRAMAR.”

As soon as Eugenie was disembarrassed of her wrappings, Lady Penrith turned to Rose.

“Crosthwaite shall stay with you, dear child, till your sister comes back,” she said, smoothing the child’s fair curls and kissing her tenderly. “You will spare her to me for a little while, and not be frightened? Eugenie, will you mind coming with me to my own room? we can talk there more easily than here.”

“Lady Penrith,” said Eugenie, as soon as they were alone, “I have been thinking—— Will you read your letter first? Colonel d’Ultramar wrote it, I think, after his last parting with Florence. You will see what he meant, and then I will tell you what has happened.”

Lionel to Amy.

“Minnaroo, August 4th, 1863.

“Words of gratitude, my darling sister, are hardly natural between us; and no words could convey my sense of obligation to Lord Penrith. Endeavour to make him understand how deeply I feel his share in your kindness. Ask him to complete it by carrying out, as trustee for those I transfer to your joint care, the money arrangements of which my solicitors will

advise him. I do not affect to part with those who have been to me as sisters for the last four years without pain, sharper and deeper than you can understand till you know them. Some time back, though not less grateful to you, I might have wished, very selfishly, not to have such cause for gratitude. Minnaroo has been a home to me; it was the only one I hoped for till now; and its breaking up cannot be pleasant. But now that I have seen the blazing roofs, the charred ruins of homes not more insecure, your offer takes a weight of terror from my heart, as well as what might have been remorse from my conscience.

“Of course, Amy, I trust you. I know you will not leave your work, like mine, half done. Having given these orphan exiles a home, I know how happy you will make it. I cannot write at length, but I must give you the outline of your charge. Florence—to whose unremitting devotion and care I owe my life—I have commended to the only friendship I could compare with yours. She deserves both—can I say more? And yet I can understand that she may sometimes perplex and provoke both. Perhaps you will understand what I mean best from a single fact:—of course you must remain unconscious of it!—Florence never forgets for a moment what the others never remembered after the first week. Various inconveniences remind her that she is still legally a slave. It is not *that*;—but—I am ashamed to write it—that she is *my* slave. She is too just, too kindly, too extravagantly grateful to bear malice on that account; but the thought used to break out in fears and fancies wilder than I can describe, and shows itself still. So, while

it is hard to lose her, I feel that she will only recover her wounded self-respect when she is not merely free in law and fact, but far away from the person to whom she holds so intolerable a relation, however nominal it be. Eva forgot it the first evening. She is a charming, companionable, simple, lively maiden—whom a sarcastic word from Lord Penrith or a look of reproof from you would crush for ever into a timid silent doll.

“Rose, a mere child, is but a paler Eva. Eugenie, the third sister, is a generous, high-minded, high-spirited damsel—who can when she chooses be a spoilt child, and chooses for half an hour in every three months. She is Florence’s opposite; and yet shows now and then glimpses of Florence’s most distressing characteristic, a morbid tendency to exaggerated self-reproach; only, if Florence had even one of Eugenie’s peccadillos to reproach herself with, she would think no penance sufficient, no absolution satisfactory. Amy, how strange you women are! One thing more. If you wish to sleep without hideous dreams, never ask, never hear, what these could tell you of the scenes amid which I have lived of late. I am fevered and tired; it is past midnight, and they start at five. I must write no more. But if we don’t meet again—and I shall hardly return to Europe—comfort yourself, my darling, with the remembrance that, among all the happy years I owe you, you never gave me an unhappy hour; and that your last kindness has been the greatest I ever received or care to receive from woman or man. So, good-bye.—L. D’U.”

“Then,” said Amy, when she had read the letter and reperused one or two passages, “Florence was to have accompanied you when this was written?”

“Certainly; but, Lady Penrith, you don’t know, I should not like to tell you, only I must—you will see that I must—how we left him. I don’t wish to hurt or frighten you—you will forgive me, will you not, for speaking out? because you cannot understand unless I do.”

“I understand. In any case, dear, I should wish to hear all.”

“Do you know, then, that Colonel d’Ultramar was wounded in the Western fighting, and we nursed him through a long illness and fever afterwards?”

“I suppose—yes, that is what he refers to in this letter. Well?”

“He was not half recovered when the Federals attacked New Orleans, but he would go. Then, you know, there has been hard fighting, constant cruel fighting, for a year past all along the line between the country our people held and theirs. Colonel d’Ultramar commanded a cavalry brigade. He was wounded again in one of the most savage combats of that war, when he caught them burning some plantations. They say—— but you will not like to hear that.”

“What is it?” Amy said, wholly misunderstanding the meaning of the girl’s pause.

“Our men were very angry, and Colonel d’Ultramar was as angry as anybody. They say ours would give no quarter, and the enemy were slaughtered almost to a man. But though he was wounded there, he would take no notice. We did not see him again till there

had been a regular battle, where they say he did what cavalry very seldom have done—charged with his whole brigade on the line of infantry fire, under the very muzzles of twenty guns. Of course his brigade was destroyed; and though he succeeded, I think that did him more harm than his own wounds. At any rate they brought him to Minnaroo, and he seemed to me worse then than before; and when the letters from England came, I watched day after day while he was making arrangements to send us away. It was killing him. I was sure he was more and more sick, more than even Florence knew; because he was always on his guard and very quiet when she was there. When she was gone it seemed as if he gave up, and in trying to explain the plan to me I felt sure he did not always know what he was saying. In truth, Lady Penrith, he was not fit to be left, but he *would* send us all. Eva could tell you, I cannot, about the last night. I know only how ill, how miserable Florence looked the next morning. But when she gave me these letters—we were then more than half-way to the river—I was stupid, and never thought what she meant. We did not find that she had gone back till it was too late. You see, all had been arranged to catch that one blockade-runner. We had but just time: it might have been weeks, months before another chance could have been found; and Colonel d'Ultramar and Mrs. Aspeden, and everybody, were determined that we—her daughters and half a dozen other ladies were with us—should be got away from Louisiana. We missed Florence as we got on board the river steamer. At first I thought she had hidden herself—she is very

shy, and she was very, *very* unhappy. But when we could not find her, I remembered she had given me a little note for Mrs. Aspeden, saying, 'if anything happens to me'; and it told that she had gone back. Mrs. Aspeden waited as long as she dared, and sent men back to look for her. You will be vexed, I know; but, Lady Penrith, if you ever see your brother again, it will be because Florence went back."

"He did not know, then?"

"Of course not!" Eugenie answered, almost indignantly. "No one but Florence dared have so disobeyed him. You should know him, Lady Penrith, better than I; but when Colonel d'Ultramar says 'must,' there is no man under his orders, much less a girl used to obey and look up to him, that would dream of saying no—or doing it."

Amy smiled at the young girl's earnestness. Accustomed herself to defer very implicitly to her brother's will, it had been so seldom pressed against her, she had seen so little of that hereditary "soul of steel" whose temper was shown in conflict and in pain, that Eugenie's words seemed to her somewhat exaggerated.

"He must have been sterner to you than I like to think?" she said, half playfully, half enquiringly.

"To us? No, Lady Penrith! Once, for a minute, he was angry—I could not tell you how wicked I had been: and I never wished again to know what his anger was like; but afterwards he was so tender, so careful—when no other man would ever have forgiven. But, don't you know, women may be startled, they are not much frightened, when men speak sharp and

loud in anger? the men you dare not, cannot disobey are those who always speak quietly and rather low, and when they are thoroughly roused speak a little lower and slower; but they look straight in your eyes, and make you feel—it is well you are a lady! Stern? I can never tell you how kind, how gentle—what he made home to us; and least of all how he treated her, as if she were something so unspeakably precious and so easily hurt. . . . So she is; and somehow she was more afraid to vex him than any of us. I don't know how Florence *dared*: and I dare say she ought not to have done it; but"—her voice took a pleading piteous tone that would have been absolutely irresistible to a colder heart than Amy's—"she always felt as if she owed him for all of us, and he had been so good, so generous to us all—we all loved him so dearly. And he did not know—perhaps he did, though; I almost think he did—but Florence knew—it was leaving him, who had given us everything, to die—alone."

Eager at once to set her friend's mind at rest, as soon as she had reconducted Eugenie to her room and could without positive unkindness leave her alone with Rose, Amy sought Alice in her own chamber.

"Best come to the point at once," she said, speaking quickly and hurriedly, as both men and women do when they have sense and tact to know that one point only is of moment, and to reach it direct through all irrelevant or secondary matter. "Lionel sent her with the others. She turned back, without his knowledge, against his will."

"Of course!" Alice answered in simple genuine

amazement. "How could he send the rest and let her stay? and his letter is quite clear; but——"

"Eugenie says," interposed Amy, seeing that Alice began to hesitate, "that he was wounded, in fever, almost delirious; and I suppose she could not bear at the last to leave him alone."

Alice drew a long sigh, half of relief, half of pain.

"I understand her, then; how could she?"

"And yet," observed Amy, a little later, "there is something that pains, that troubles you still. What is it? Alice, I am sure you may trust Eugenie's story; it agrees so exactly with his letter."

"Do you think I doubt? Amy, have you known your brother so much longer than I and can doubt him, you who trusted so thoroughly before? No—but if, as seems too likely, Florence has compromised herself irretrievably for him——"

She could not go on; and Amy, startled by a thought which had not occurred to her before, ran rapidly over the various considerations that occurred to her own mind before she could answer, and answered at last with more of hesitation in her tone than she intended to be apparent—

"If he have not promised, if he have not answered your letter as he should have done, if he can think himself free—— Alice, I am sure of one thing, no temptation could—nay, nothing to him would be a temptation to forfeit you. Few women, I take it, are loved as he loves you. But all the more, if he is not bound he may think—— What has he said to you? Nay, I don't ask, I know you cannot show his letter; but——" The brightening colour, the look of pride

in the dark grey Irish eyes sufficiently answered her. "Well, then, if he has given his word, he will keep *that*. To break it under any temptation, under any compulsion, is to him the one thing impossible. If it were possible to save Florence, he would do it, perhaps, at any sacrifice. But if he has given his word, you are as safe as if actually married to him. No claim that law or religion could give you would create for him an impossibility half so absolute, so insuperable as his word of honour."

"A poor security, I should say," said Lord Penrith, when Amy repeated this assertion to him, "if love of her and knowledge of her love would not bind him."

"You don't know him, Edward. You don't know how absolute, how imperious a religion to him is the tradition of chivalry. I did not choose to tell Alice that the sacrifice he would make, in giving his hand and name to one whose birth would mean as much to him as it seems to mean to our Southern friends, would be all but as great as the sacrifice of *her*; because the greater the sacrifice the more likely is Lionel to make it. But he cannot conceive the possibility of breaking his word once given."

What Alice thought and felt may be best understood from the letter which she wrote a few days afterwards. It did not reach its destination till Fate had solved the question on which it dwelt so anxiously.

Alice to Lionel.

"You have so much cause to doubt my faith in you that your perplexity, your pain, may well be even

greater than was my own at the first moment, before I had opened your letter. Its first words relieved all doubts, all fears—but one. I had not cared to ask Eva a single question, if common kindness would have permitted one. I understood what must have happened as soon as I could read your answer, even before Amy came to repeat to me Eugenie's explanation. Only, Eugenie will not tell me—what I think she has told Amy—of the danger you so carefully conceal; I see you were worse than they will let me know. I need say no more about our common disappointment. Surely I need not tell you that I have never doubted the sincerity with which you recommended Florence to my friendship, or that I would have been true to your charge. But to her—give her my love, my thanks, as well as Amy's. We can well understand why she felt it impossible to desert you in suffering and danger; that your very eagerness to place her and her sisters in safety made it more than ever intolerable to leave you uncared for, who had cared so long and so kindly for them. What that care has been, the little I have heard from Eva, and Amy from Eugenie, tells better than they themselves are aware. Florence cannot doubt that, when she can come to us, she shall be the more welcome, the dearer to all who love you for a delay so caused.

“You will not doubt me, Lionel; doubt that I mean and will be true to every word I write? If not—if you can really feel the full, the generous confidence your letter expresses and makes me so anxious to deserve, and if this be not too late—I can have nothing

to fear. Do not, pray do not misunderstand me—it is not that I doubt your love or distrust your loyalty, but that I dread your generosity. Florence has risked so much for you—you may well be driven to think that you must protect her, at whatever cost, from the consequences of her heedless self-devotion. And if you can do so willingly—she has deserved your love better than I do or ever can—if you can really give it her, do not think that I will reproach you, even in thought. Above all, I would not have you feel as Amy says you will feel, bound by what you have written to me, if your heart were not in the words. But I have read them again and again, trying hard to weigh them fairly, and I cannot think that you felt less than you have written. If it be so—then, Lionel, be true before you try to be generous—true to her as well as to yourself and to me. Do not pretend to give her what it will break her heart to find a pretence. To a girl such as you describe her, as her sisters' clinging affection bespeaks her, as she has proved herself, what undeserved reproach from the world would be half so cruel as the reproach you would imply, if you thought her error so fatal that you must sacrifice yourself to cover it? What could so ill requite her unselfish impulse? What could so outrage a woman's delicacy, a woman's love, as a marriage of compassion? If that alone could save her—and if you could ensure her against discovering the truth—perhaps . . . But surely it is not so; at least, if you can trust my faith, and give me the power and the right to protect her in your name? Surely—forgive me if in so grave a matter I disregard all conventional reserve,

and care only that you understand me clearly—surely the friendship, the companionship, the sisterly affection of your betrothed wife must set her right with the world, and even if need be with her own sensitive spirit, yet more completely than you could do? Will you not believe that she will be safer with me than even before she had risked so much for you? But if you have decided otherwise, if my assurance come too late, if . . . do not reproach yourself, Lionel, or think that I reproach you. If you can forget that you are breaking my heart, it will be because you feel only that you are breaking your own. In that case, never, never let her guess what she has cost you; never let her know how dear you were, I fear must always be, to her who, while you can keep faith with her—till you yourself tell her that you have broken it—is ever your own ALICE.”

CHAPTER XIII.

LOVE-LOYAL.

“And peradventure, had he seen her first,
She might have made this and that other world
Another world for the sick man.”

LIONEL was still sleeping when Mrs. Duval insisted on relieving Florence's guard, though but for the two hours that might elapse before the surgeon's visit; and Florence knew nothing of the use made, immediately on his awakening, of the brief period of her absence. At conscious imminent risk, by sheer force of will, the invalid for a short time quelled the raging fever, drove back or crushed down the rising delirium, forced the reeling brain to coherent thought and intelligible expression, compelled the feeble trembling fingers to trace the lines his failing sight refused to follow, told Florence's story simply, truthfully, touchingly, and concluded with an earnest passionate appeal.

“She deserves your kindness, Amy, as she needs it, more than ever. Will you withdraw it because she could not leave your brother, her guardian, to die like a dog, alone, uncared for?”

So ended the letter which Lady Penrith received,

with the endorsement of the State Department at Washington as "Captured at Sea," soon after the close of the war. A few words had been appended by the surgeon in attendance:—

"At the writer's request I avouch that Miss Dupont returned to nurse him in great danger—greater than either is fully aware. Whatever the purport of this letter, he has certainly and knowingly risked life to write it."

"So much love, so little trust!" murmured Amy, sadly, as her tears fell fast over the strangely wavering lines, the formal signature, never before employed in addressing her—"Ultramar"—and the seal with its familiar star and sword, and the legend "*Loyal à mort.*"

Florence would hardly have felt so confident in the justification of her return, had she conceived how far the agitation it had caused had contributed to the alarming increase of fever, the uncontrollable delirium, the terrible failing of strength, which were apparent when she re-entered the sick-room. For weeks the invalid's life was absolutely dependent on an incessant care, vigilance, and skill that no one but herself, or perhaps Afzul, whose absolute fealty to his master truly "passed the love of woman," would or could have given. Till Afzul's return Florence never long left her patient; afterwards one or the other sat by the pillow by day or by night, till at last the light of collected consciousness returned to the eyes so long brilliant with fever. But the patient's weakness was such that, even then, his nurse's alarm was long protracted.

“Once more, Miss Dupont,” said the doctor at last, “our friend certainly owes you his life. I may tell you now, I did not think he would long survive your departure ; still less did I think he would recover after the night of your return. Only such nursing as yours could a second time have pulled him through ; and even that must have failed had he lived as most young men, I suppose especially most soldiers, do. There is the strength of hereditary as well as personal temperance of every kind, the vigour of systematic physical training pursued for years, in that frame, or it could not have survived what would have killed men with four times his natural vitality. I wish we could move him ; Minnaroo will not be safe long. And do you know, moreover, that you will be absolutely alone after to-day ? Mrs. Peyton is going ; I must say I advise you to go with her. I can arrange it with our patient without agitating him as you would do, if you will let me.”

“Indeed I will not. I could not repeat to you the defence of my disobedience I made to him. But you know what I am in reality, however he has chosen to treat me differently ; and if I owed him nothing but that treatment, how could I leave him now ?”

The doctor looked upon her with more compassion than surprise, neither perhaps quite complimentary ; as one who thinks : “Well, it is the old story over again, and one knows the end.” Like all his comrades profoundly admiring the brilliant soldier, it seemed to him natural enough that Florence should be passionately in love with her young protector ; not strange that she should sacrifice everything to that

love. But that the sacrifice could have any other issue than the loss of all that one who was a slave by birth and law had yet to lose, never occurred to him.

Long before he could write himself, Lionel had employed Florence as his amanuensis in an important correspondence with the State and military authorities. To reconstitute his almost annihilated regiment in its old form was, for more than one reason, little to his mind. By gathering from all the trans-Mississippi States men of the type he preferred to command, numbers of whom were eager to serve under him, he could create a larger and more formidable force, and one upon which a distinctive character might be yet more easily impressed. With some difficulty, and with the support of more than one distinguished Confederate leader, he obtained permission to organize a so-called Legion; to which, however, he gave the form and internal order of a brigade consisting of two regiments, each of from seven to eight hundred lances and carbines. The drilling and disciplining of this force—in which enlisted multitudes of lawless spirits from all quarters, as well as men of higher quality and education attracted by the character of the probable service and the name of their leader—was carried on under his minute instructions by the surviving officers of the 20th Louisiana, and several others, selected with the utmost care from among those with whose capacity his previous experience had acquainted him, and who seemed best fitted to his especial purpose.

He remembered very imperfectly the conversation of that critical evening, and was naturally most averse

to renew the argument, which nevertheless the consequences of Florence's return and the gathering perils of the position must compel him speedily to reopen and to settle. Repugnant as was to him the idea of marriage with a lady of mixed race, however refined, attractive, lovable in herself, so strong was his sense of what was due to Florence's self-abandonment and devotion that, but for the counter-obligations of love and loyalty to another, he would have felt such a marriage almost forced upon him. He was able to move about the house, and was daily expecting decisive orders, when accident rather than deliberate purpose brought about the inevitable explanation. Florence had persistently evaded the resumption of her former position; allowing none of the old restraints to interfere with her care of or services to him, but declining as far as possible the kindly and equal tone of their habitual intercourse. This waywardness, and perhaps on his own part something of the susceptibility of illness, provoked a discussion much more definite and decisive than he had intended.

"Florence," he said, in reply to a sentence in which she insisted as before on the reality of their legal relation, "you know how deeply such language, such an attitude must grieve me; but that is a secondary consideration. What is of moment is, that when you speak of yourself as a slave in more than form and name, you say what is no more true than it is kind; what besides puts you in a false, it might possibly prove a dangerous, position."

"No, Monseigneur! Except that if I fell into the enemy's hands they might possibly treat a slave even

worse than a free-woman, your slave is as safe as I could wish to be. You have made me secure if I could be so miserable as to outlive you, and meantime that title is the surest protection a coloured girl could enjoy. No one dare wrong what is yours ; and I don't wish—how could I?—to be released from your control : I owe too much to it.”

“ You don't know what you are saying, Florence. You are trusting me further than any lady should trust—further,” he added, half aside, “ than any man should be tempted. And ”—he hesitated, almost as much embarrassed as a girl at finding himself forced into explanation likely to be awkward or unpleasant to feminine feelings—“ that is not all. A man can and ought to defy all that may be said of him ; a lady, especially one so young, must defer to the opinion of the world to which she belongs.”

“ And to what world do I belong ? To the world of slaves who think it a distinction to be *your* slave, a rare honour to be a favourite chattel of yours ? Or to the world of slave-owners who know that a slave has no power, no will of her own save by sufferance ? No, Colonel d'Ultramar ; if I have doubted what one or two seemed to think of me lately, it is only because you have taken so much pains to make them forget what duty I owe you.”

“ Spare me, Florence, if you will not spare yourself ! Such words can only remind me by what grievous fault of mine it is possible for you to use them ; and they are not true. You were free in fact—would have been in a few days free under the English flag. It is to your own spontaneous kindness that I

owe the care which has a second time saved my life. Will you force me to feel that it was far too dearly bought?"

"As if a hundred such as I were worth a life like yours, in the sight of Heaven or of our country! Monseigneur, it was as your slave that I had a right to return; and in that character I can be no burden, no trouble to you. But do not praise me for returning: I cannot bear it. I did come back for your sake, to care for, to nurse you, knowing you were more sick than you would own and in greater danger than even you knew. But that was not all. I could not bear to go; and if the world says that I was glad of an excuse in my own eyes and in yours, it will say no worse of me than I deserve."

This confession, the last thing he had expected, confounded and bewildered him. He was silent perforce, and Florence presently continued—

"If a slave could be compromised, my return has done all the harm that anything can do, and you cannot undo it now. It was no fault of yours; I would not be saved at such a price; and I don't, I cannot repent while you speak kindly and look at me with no contempt in your eyes. And how can that be wrong now which was right three months ago? People may talk, may think—but what of that? All the harm it can do *me* is done already; and surely you will not grieve and wound me, you will not condemn my return by sending me away, for anything that anybody dare say of you? . . . unless you have learned to . . . to despise me," she faltered, in a tone so low that he scarcely caught the words.

She looked up shyly for a moment as she spoke. Certainly there was nothing in his countenance which her acutely sensitive, waywardly susceptible spirit could imagine to express reproach or even displeasure. But there was an intense regret, a sad sorrowful pity which surprised and almost awed her. In truth Lionel at that moment bitterly and naturally blamed himself for all that had happened. He could not reproach himself for treating a sensitive, dependent, most unfortunate girl with anxious kindness and consideration; but she should not have remained so long, so closely dependent on himself. Doubtless, since he had so unexpectedly renewed his acquaintance with Florence in her sorest need, in his own hour of bitterest pain and loneliness, the rupture of all dearer and closer ties, as well as the strange character of their relation, and her own intense sensitiveness and helpless clinging dependence, had infused into his feeling as well as his manner towards her a deeper tenderness than he would have owned to himself. But, despite one fatal experience, he remained incredulous as ever that maiden love could be won unsought. Men are sometimes harshly censured for such errors; but a man who should take care that girls should not fall in love with him, would display an offensive conceit pretty sure to render precaution needless. Conscious of a personal beauty too striking to be ignored, Lionel never dreamt that it could seriously affect the fancy of women. If he entertained a single disparaging idea of the sex, it was a half-formed notion that they were more attracted by a form of comeliness lower and less like

their own—the big-featured bewhiskered face, the broad large-boned frame called especially masculine. He had fancied Florence more oppressed by the recollection of their legal than gratified by the kindness of their practical relation, till the truth was revealed by her return and her avowal.

“The last thought that could occur to me,” he said at length, “would be to slight or wrong the affectionate impulse to which I owe so much. But, dearest Florence, you must say no more. Trust my counsel now as you have always done. Don’t force me to explain. Enough that Minnaroo will not long be a safe home for you, for any lady.”

“Let me remain near, where I can nurse you if you are wounded again. Let me belong to you, be of use to you—and send me where you like; but don’t send me away from you again. It was hard enough to be sent to England, to your own sister; it would be worse, far worse, anywhere in the South. I dare not, you know I dare not—you have never thought I should be safe without your protection. Monseigneur, you will not, you cannot lie; say that it is only beyond the enemy’s reach that you wish to send me, and I will obey—no, I suppose I *must* obey—but I will be content.”

“Child, I know—you do not know, do not mean what you ask. You say rightly, I will not lie to you. There are perils almost worse than capture. Will you not believe that it wrings my heart to part with you, that I do it for your own sake, and spare me—what I cannot bear to speak or you to hear?”

“For my sake, of course; but it is mistaken

kindness. What have I left to lose? Believe me, you cannot hurt me—at least, you can say nothing, do nothing I will not willingly bear, except that you should condemn my return, and show what you think of it by sending me away, so probably never to see you again. I cannot bear that. But speak, Monseigneur, and see if there be anything else I would not endure from you or for you.”

His voice faltered, his face was turned aside as he answered hoarsely and low, in a tone of indescribable sadness and pain—

“You wring my words from me; I would rather give my heart’s blood, if it would spare us both. Forgive me—if that be possible. Florence, I was once, or thought myself, compelled to accept a similar sacrifice. It ended—as such things always end; and I have never ceased to reproach myself with the guilt of blood.”

“Do you think I should grudge you my life? I will give it as freely as your soldiers give theirs every day. And you cannot blame yourself; it is my prayer: whatever happens, the fault, if there be any, rests on me.”

“Florence, will you not understand? Do you not know that there is but one right by which you could remain with me? Unless I could make you—my wife—I must part with you.”

She had listened with bent head and countenance half concealed, partly in formal submission, partly no doubt really afraid to encounter his eyes as he uttered the warning so extorted and so prefaced. But now she rose erect, and for a moment at least looked

fearlessly and frankly into a face fuller of shame and pain than her own.

“Your wife?—Never, Colonel d’Ultramar! If you had wished it, if you had loved me even as I love you, do you think I would let you so disgrace yourself before your comrades, your soldiers, and the whole South—worse than all, in your own eyes? On that subject you are as proud as the proudest gentleman of Virginia or South Carolina, prouder than a Custis or a Hampton; and well you may!—But you don’t wish it; you would never give me your name except to cover the dishonour of mine. Could anything so degrade, so shame a woman? Could anything tell me more plainly that you thought—what others may think if they please? How would my return seem then, even to you and to myself? No, Monseigneur; I am your slave, whether you will or no; yours to serve, to live, to die for you—yes! Yours to degrade and dishonour you, to ruin your pride, your heart, your life; to be your reproach and your burden!—never!”

The bitter sincerity with which the young maiden repudiated an idea essentially as dishonouring to herself as in her view it would have been degrading to him, was beyond doubt or question. And he understood and appreciated her feeling, as he had understood throughout the nature and the limits of her error; had felt that she was pleading not for indulgence to a passion of whose meaning she was unconscious, but for liberty to defy the conventions that could hardly apply to her position, the censures of a world that could hardly wrong her more deeply than it had done

already. She owed everything to the very protection of which that world would deprive her. Remembering her nominal master's long, loyal, vigilant guardianship, aware that she could not be more absolutely in his power than she had always been, half-distraught between love, loneliness, and fear—it was not strange that she failed to comprehend the change effected by her sisters' absence and her own avowal. She knew that, both in her return and in her confession, she had infringed the rules applicable to a different social position; but she failed to discern that the social law could justly affect one whom it had outlawed, or be morally binding on the conscience of a slave. It was no doubt partly under the influence of this feeling that she insisted so strongly on that aspect of her situation. What must be the final relation of such a slave to such a master had never occurred to her; till some sort of misgiving, some formless shadow of uneasiness was first cast upon her conscience by Lionel's own urgency for her departure. Of sinful intention she was wholly innocent; of practical danger almost absolutely unconscious.

Her reply brought the conversation to a dead-lock. Lionel felt that there was but one thing left to do, one word to speak—and that thing impossible, that word unutterable. Florence knew nothing of Alice, had never heard her name save in connection with the letter she was to have delivered; and he had now made reference to her, avowal of the truth, doubly impossible by the suggestion on which he had ventured only in full assurance that it would terminate the discussion at once. To say that he was conscious of no temptation

not wholly unselfish would be to say that he was less or more than man ; either that, in the flush of youth, high-spirited, fiery, passionate, susceptible alike by personal character and hereditary temperament, he was insensible to love that might have won the coldest heart, to loveliness that might have maddened alike a profligate or a poet—or that he possessed the calm self-control of a saint, the last character to which he could or would have pretended. But no selfish temptation could have rendered him a second time untrue to Alice ; false this time to plighted faith. Nor, while Florence remained true to herself, could he have endured to soil the loyalty that had so endeared and hallowed their strange relation, had given to the least natural of ties the tenderness, sacredness, simplicity of home affection. Of the purity of that relation he was keenly jealous and justly proud ; nor did Florence's unconscious error release the bond. Truly had he told her that she did not know, did not mean what she asked. The trust he had invited and accepted was never more binding than now, when her absolute confidence in him, the devotion which his own conduct had won, had drawn her so close to the verge of peril. The temptation was subtler, deeper, stronger, that it appealed less to selfish desires than to the vigilant, unselfish, considerate tenderness by which such desires had been so long suppressed, so completely quelled. To repulse, insult, humble to the dust her whom it had been the religion of his recent life to shelter, to screen from every pang of mortification, every shadow of abasement ; to bruise, to crush the heart whose sensitive, shrinking delicacy he

knew so well and had shielded so anxiously—this was the supreme, present, overwhelming impossibility. Baffled, distressed, bewildered—for it had never occurred to him that, the case as he saw it once stated, Florence could fail to see it in the same light; nor had he realized how difficult escape had become, how far the mischief was all but irreparable—he turned instinctively to the countenance from which as he spoke he had as instinctively averted his eyes. The sight of that clinging, defenceless, appealing girlhood smote, stung him to the heart. He shivered from head to foot. Well for both that Florence dreamed not to what she tempted; that he whom she tried so sorely understood and revered her still. Had a shadow rested on her purity of soul, or darkened the clearness of his absolute faith in her, self-control might hardly have been possible. He stood silent, shaken to the soul, for a time not to be measured by the seconds that may have elapsed. When he gained strength to speak, the instinct of chivalry, the habit of reverential tenderness for her, had reasserted their wonted ascendancy alike over the almost forgotten necessity of the future and the vanquished peril of the moment. His one thought was to spare and soothe her feelings, to lull the quick susceptibility of unrequited affection, to heal the wounded pride of womanhood.

“Forgive me, Florence! I knew not what to say, how to explain. Forgive me what I should not have let you force from me. But you cannot doubt either my affection or my respect. I am not worth, no man could be worth, the least part of all I have cost you

already ; it would break my heart to cost you more. But you know you cannot be less, you are if possible more to me than you have always been ; more precious and more honoured since you have given such costly proof of your uncalculating, devoted kindness. I see—" he broke off with an unconscious sigh of intense relief, as they stood by the window of his study, " Afzul brings me despatches, probably orders, to which I must attend at once. Leave me now, dear Florence. Think once again, and think if you can more wisely, more of yourself and less of me."

The last words were characteristic, the more so because spoken in such perfect simplicity. Happy for the speaker, perhaps, that he never had the opportunity to put his estimate of woman's love to the test of experience.

Florence was not convinced ; for the words which might have been conclusive were neutralized to her mind and heart by a fact which Lionel had wholly forgotten, but which, when it recurred to her remembrance, gave to his argument a meaning altogether deceptive. Marriage, legal, valid marriage, such as alone she could conceive to be within his meaning, was impossible between master and slave. But for that insuperable bar he might, she thought, have returned her affection ; so far had the fatal tenderness of his last words effaced the impression of all that had preceded. Did not the very fact that she could never be more to him entitle her without doubt or reproach to remain what she was, since he would not allow her to be less ? Perhaps she could not remain under his roof ; that was a question for his decision, but it was

not the vital question. She had dreaded with extreme, perhaps exaggerated, but certainly not ungrounded terror, the helpless, friendless solitude of her position if finally separated from him. But now—she could trust all to the thoughtful vigilant consideration that had never failed her, that had sheltered her and her sisters as effectually when he was serving in Virginia or Kentucky as while he remained at Minnaroo. Her removal, at this period of incessant alarm and ceaseless occupation, must be matter of time. Meanwhile the necessities of war excused whatever might have seemed unbecoming in peace. She would be left with him for a while—and how much he still needed her!—not as the slave she claimed her right to be, but as the friend, the cherished and honoured ward he had ever chosen to consider her. And when they must part—well, while the tie was unbroken, they were parted only as war had parted and must again part them; and if they lived, surely they would meet again under happier conditions. Florence assumed that her return had forfeited finally Lady Penrith's offered protection, and on this point Lionel dared not contradict her. Of his love for another, it has already been said, she had no suspicion. That love was the bitterest of those English recollections whereof he never spoke, on which his wards had never ventured to touch; and the same packet that brought Alice's forgiveness having brought Amy's offer to take charge of them—the next few days having been occupied in the arrangements for their journey—Alice's name had never been mentioned in Florence's hearing till, at the last moment of a bitterly painful parting, the

letter had been almost silently given into her care.

The necessity of further debate, of immediate action, was averted by the contents of the despatches which had caused so welcome an interruption. General Marion, still unable to command in the field, had been charged with important military duties in that part of Louisiana; and, his own home having perished, requested for himself and his staff the hospitality which Colonel d'Ultramar rejoiced to afford. For nearly a month the invalid soldier was engaged almost constantly in such duties as a convalescence, apparently more rapid than he himself could have hoped, enabled him to perform. On the General's departure, he would be left in command of his own Legion, and some other irregular forces, and in charge of an extensive line of military frontier, with orders to occupy a strong and central but concealed position, and to harass the enemy by an incessant active partisan warfare. He learnt with bitter pain that permanent defence was hardly possible, and that the fate of Minnaroo, though it might be postponed, could scarcely be doubtful. He did not know till then how dearly he loved the home whose beauty was its least charm for him, and which his soldierly fame had marked as an object of dastardly vengeance to an enemy who never respected the laws either of war or of honour. But he could not stoop to utter a word of complaint or regret in the presence of those who had suffered far more terribly; who had witnessed the destruction, not only of ancestral homes, but of acquired or inherited fortunes; who had seen

mothers and sisters, wives and children, reduced at once from wealth to indigence, and driven into homeless exile.

Amid all his cares, anxieties and labours, Florence found herself more than ever the foremost object of his thought. He would not let her feel or fancy that any estrangement, any new constraint, had been created; and the presence of others was turned to account to render their intercourse at once safe and easy. No day passed on which, more than once, a few kindly sentences were not interchanged between them, unheard by other ears. General Marion, much attached to his young lieutenant, treated Florence with paternal kindness, with a delicate courtesy that went far to set even that timid, sensitive spirit at ease. She would if possible have shrunk from the presence of strangers; but this Lionel, well aware what inferences would be drawn from such seclusion, would not permit. Assisted by the considerate kindness of his chief, he obliged the shy, shrinking girl to take the same part, ensured for her the same respect and deference, that she would have enjoyed in her father's lifetime as the rightful mistress of the house; while all was so arranged and conducted as to render clear and obvious the character of her relation to its present owner. Lionel had contrived, moreover, to her infinite relief and consolation, several apparently accidental *tête-à-tête* interviews; protected, by the delicate consideration imposed on all by the example of the General, alike from the appearance of secrecy and the reality of intrusion. Meanwhile, without reverting to other reasons, he had quietly

taken for granted the imperative necessity of her departure from so dangerous a situation, and had secured her tacit submission to a half-complete plan first mooted in her presence by General Marion. But before this could be carried out, the retirement of their guests left Colonel d'Ultramar in charge of the Confederate forces near Minnaroo. To Florence alone did he entrust the secret of their position. To her he described it so minutely that she, whose rides with her father had long ago made her acquainted with almost every road and bridle-path for many a mile around, could at any time have made her way thither; so that she could indicate a direct route to its nearest outpost to any messenger familiar with the principal landmarks of the neighbourhood.

“But,” she pleaded, when a carefully worded sentence startled her into the apprehension of the purpose he had studiously concealed till all was prepared for its execution—looking up into his face with a painful alarm, an intense anxiety that for the moment overpowered all shame, all shyness, almost all reserve—“why should you go—to-night above all? I am sure they don't expect it of you; you are not fit; you are in no state to bear camping out in the open air; you will be ill again before you yourself expect to meet the enemy. Stay, do stay, just a little while longer. They can send for you; they can report to you here; you will be just as useful here as there. It is not that the General and his staff are gone; that makes no difference; they did not meddle with your command, of late. And—it is the first time—I shall be all alone. Ah—is that your reason?

It is not kind, it is a reproach to me, if you leave me for that. What have I to do with the fancies of white ladies, now? Is it not telling me how wrong I was to return? And even if this were not your home, or if I had not so long held the place in it that you took such thought and pains to make for me—if we were strangers, if I were neither what I am in fact, nor what your kindness has chosen to call me—you need not be so careful, so ceremonious, now. Would you be very angry if I gave a night's shelter to any Southern soldier in your absence? The people that choose to think evil will not be prevented by anything you can do now: and those who know you would think it only natural that I should remain with you—till you can send me away. Is not *that* hard enough—too hard to bear—when I have lost friends, sisters, everything for you, for the right to belong to you and to do my duty by you?—yes, my duty, if it were only because I am not a slave in more than name. I would not go unless you forced me, only that it would grieve you so terribly if I came to any harm by staying. And, here or there, I am yours; you promised me *that*; you will not break my heart by forgetting it? But while you let me stay here, you must not leave me—me who have left myself nothing else. I am so utterly, so terribly alone.”

Her voice, tremulous with agitation, passionate in its earnest pleading as if beseeching for very life, the strange excitement of her tone and manner—in truth, the poor girl was well-nigh frantic with grief, distress, and terror—made him turn to look into her face. Its

expression might possibly have shaken his resolve ; but the head had drooped on his shoulder, and the quivering lips, changeful colour, and wistful, frightened eyes were concealed from his sight.

“ Monseigneur, it is not kind ; it is not like you. And I dare not be left alone : I dare not,” she went on, earnestly, and shuddering violently in a terror evidently extreme and unaffected. “ I dreamt last night—ah, such a dream . . . so long, so distinct, so dreadfully cruel—and so terrible at last. I was so lonely ; no one was kind, no one would speak to me, not even Eva. But you were always the same, supporting, helping me, as gentle, as courteous as ever. Then people gathered round us—all the evil faces I ever saw ; and I was frightened to death—no ! much worse than that—till I felt that you held me, you were carrying me. There was a fire all round us, like that of which Miss Edwards spoke so often with such horror ; and men, like devils, yelling and snatching. But you held me fast through all. Then I was lying—I don’t know where, but I should know the place again if I saw it. I felt your arm round me : I was happy, only that you seemed so sad, so sorry for me. Then on a sudden it grew dark ; but through the dark I saw—— Oh, do hold me ”—clinging close to him, and looking up in eager appeal, as he instinctively drew her within his arm. “ It was—I knew him at once—it was Death ; and he seized and dragged me away. You would not or could not hold me fast ; and I woke with a scream, trembling all over. Ah, do not, do not leave me to that, whatever it meant ! . . . Rather than that, hold me one minute.

in your arms, kiss me once as you kissed me the night I came back—and then kill me yourself before I know it, before you go. You may—you can—remember! Ah, if you could feel, could know! . . . Do hear me—you have been so careful, so tender of me; listen now. Nothing, the worst I ever feared, was half so terrible as what I fear now. You would not, you could not leave me if you could understand, if you would believe how frightened I am, even if it were mere foolish fear. But I am sure there is more than that.”

She shivered so violently as the recollection of this terror seemed to overpower all the softer, warmer, more natural emotions that had prompted her previous words and looks of appeal, that he almost shrank from the parting on which he had determined; drew her close to his bosom, and soothed her with caressing and protecting clasp as he answered—

“I shall see you again, no doubt, and often, dear Florence. But I must go now. You know how to send for me if I am wanted. Our outposts, remember, are ten miles south of this; they hold the river bank at — and form a line twelve miles inland from that; and by their report there is no enemy within two days’ march of you. Dear child, you are still in my guard, remember; can you not trust to it? Well, I will have you really, perfectly safe in a few days: nay, nay, Florence, I shall, I will, see you again before I come to take leave of you. . . . It is lonely for you, though, quite alone here. I wish it were not so. Well, dear, if you are afraid keep Mrs. Duval with you, take the upper rooms and fasten your doors. You know you can bar them so that no force could

break them down. Then perhaps you will sleep more fearlessly; though in truth you are as safe as if I were here, and half a troop encamped on the lawn yonder. Now, dearest, I must go. It is no kindness to either to make the parting longer. *Au revoir.*"

He stooped, kissed her with a tenderness which on this occasion at any rate was simply impulsive, natural and unstudied; and almost wrenched himself from her clinging clasp to spring through the window, mount the horse that was held for him outside, and ride away at a pace at which practised riders seldom start, unless there be instant work ahead or pain from which they would fain escape behind them.

It was done in truest love and loyalty, in sincerest, deepest, most unselfish kindness. But to his last hour Lionel never ceased to repent and reproach himself with that parting; to curse that regard for her name, that deference for her sake to the world's conventions, that led him to deny Florence's prayer, that made him deaf to the pleadings of her terror, hardened him against the agonized entreaty of those wild, frightened eyes. The worst sin of a long life of evil could hardly be regretted with keener, bitterer, crueller remorse than followed, to his dying day, that act of untimely or ill-fated virtue.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE BLUE RIDGE.

“No; vainly to each holy shrine
In mutual pilgrimage they drew,
Implored in vain the grace divine
For chiefs their own red falchions slew.
While Cessford owns the rule of Carr,
While Ettrick boasts the line of Scott,
The slaughtered chiefs, the mortal jar,
The havoc of the feudal war,
Shall never, never be forgot.”

At a late period in the war—when the outer shell of the Confederate defence had been pierced in one direction after another, and its hollowness, through the sheer exhaustion of the military population of the South, was apparent to the Southerners themselves, and to the few cool judges in the North and in Europe who understood the meaning of Northern successes everywhere else coupled with repeated, signal Northern defeats in Virginia—two men rode slowly up the Eastern slope of the Blue Ridge, the beautiful range of mountains that forms the Eastern boundary of the loveliest and wealthiest part of the Old Dominion—known generally as the Valley of Virginia, in a more limited geographical sense as the Valley of the Shenandoah. One, the younger, wore

a uniform evidently Southern, though the grey helmet with its red and black bands, a few red and black feathers forming the crest, was unique; as the conspicuous red and black facings were altogether exceptional in the Confederate service. The elder, heavier horseman, deeply bearded and with a complexion bronzed under a warmer sun than that even of the Gulf States, seemed to have taken some pains to give to what looked like the dress of an English Volunteer, save that buttons and facings had been removed, a close resemblance to the general uniform of the Confederates.

“You should understand fully,” said the former, “what you are doing. Do not think that joining *ours* is like joining any other regiment even in our service; and our service now means much more than an even chance of death—most of us, I think, rather hope to die—before the war is over. You say you have known the Colonel in India: you knew him then as I knew him before the calamities, the wrongs that have made him what he is. Even now his appearance, his manner, the very tones of his voice in peace—I mean in the quiet of the bivouac, the only home he knows—make the contrast of his bearing in the field still more strange and terrible. He had rendered his name dreaded along all the debatable ground of Louisiana before the fatal day that made him what he is now. If I live, which is not likely, to extremest old age, whatever I may see hereafter, the memory of that day will be the most terrible, the most vivid of my life, and will be present to me fifty years hence as it is now. I never think of it, speak of it, but the

whole scene is before me and almost makes me shudder ; and yet no one has been through this war, as I have, without seeing such sights as might appal a trained veteran. I was on guard at the inner picket of our camp when a negro, reeling in his saddle, galloped in and told me in five words that at least two thousand of the enemy, commanded by General Ballard—one of those attorney-Generals, politicians turned into bad soldiers, who are the opprobrium of the Federal service—were threatening Minnaroo, our Colonel's home. I knew they would burn it. I knew there was a woman there, a girl I had once seen. I cannot, and would not *now*, describe a beauty the like of which I never saw. She was by law a slave, but by birth, breeding, education a lady as refined as any in Louisiana. It happened that I had carried her the news of a former sharp action, and had then seen in her face, before she could speak, her fear, her intense anxiety for our chief. The boy fell half-dead as he told his message. I could not wait ; I ordered my men to be ready as I mounted and galloped to *his* quarters, some half-mile further in. I had rather a hundred times have faced the heaviest fire of shot and shell I ever knew, than have done what I had to do. He was sleeping, sleeping as he always does by the bivouac fire, the sword belted on, only his helmet off, not even his saddle for a pillow, for he will not even unsaddle when danger is near, but only loosens the girths. Before I could reach him he had sprung to his feet ; and he read, I suppose, what I had to say in my face, for before I spoke the name of Minnaroo his own turned white as death. I should not have known

the voice, I could have sworn it was not his; as unlike his tone in peace as in the battle-words that have so often rung along our line, as he said—

“ ‘Sound the *reveillée*. Tell Colonel Pereiro to bring on the rest of the Legion—to surround and close in upon them.’

He was in the saddle; he had gathered some fifty men, and went forward at full gallop. I caught them up within half a mile from Minnaroo, just in view of the enemy's line. The flames were rising already behind, and some four hundred men were straight before us, drawn up steadily, rifles ready and bayonets fixed. It seemed by instinct that he halted us—we were at full gallop—for one half-minute to form our line. I said to him: ‘It is sheer madness!’ for he *was* mad; but he half turned and only answered in his usual tone of command, ‘Silence in the ranks! Charge!’ Their fire disabled one-half our men or horses; but he was in front, and there was not one who would have hesitated to follow him through the flames of Hell. We broke them—dashed through—there were not more than five and twenty following him. Two strokes he struck with his own sword to right and left as we charged through. I learnt then for the first time how the spirit can strengthen the arm. One right hand, with the sword it held—an officer's, of course—was actually lopped off; and the other man's head dropped to one side, the neck cut half through. I never saw an uglier sight; as a rule, cavalry combats don't leave such hideous traces. Scores of men were dispersed, plundering or setting fire to the house in new places; but one group was

gathered under the window where, the flames having already caught the rooms below, that young girl stood. I heard a voice I had heard before, their Brigadier's, mocking—

“‘Come, be quick, pretty one; unbar the door, and we will bring you out safe. There are worse things, you see, than slavery, even to me.’

“We had broken the line so quickly, we dashed at such speed up the slope, that they were not aware, could not turn till we were upon them. But the Colonel struck not a blow till he reached *him*; and struck him twice, like lightning, but I am sure both blows were well and truly aimed—and not to kill. The first gashed his face from eyes to chin, so that the mother who bore him could never have endured to look on the ghastly object again; the second caught him above the hips, crippling him horribly, and for ever. The man's screams were hideous to hear. Then the enemy rushed in and closed round us, happily before he had time to dismount. I never saw, never shall see again a fight like that—twenty-five to two hundred at least; every man of us would have been killed at once if they could have reached us. But they crowded and hampered themselves; and we fought, as they say, ‘like devils’—at any rate as men seldom have the chance to fight. We had actually cleared a space around us, walled in by the piles of dead. How many shots had been fired among us I don't know—probably at least as many as there were enemies around—and half our men were out of their saddles, fighting even as they lay on the ground, shooting with their revolvers, striking with lance or

carbine-butt even in the death-agony. But he—neither bullet nor bayonet seemed to touch him ; and yet they were aiming at his life above all. His sword never rested, and never seemed to come down without being answered by a death-yell. For one moment—I don't know how it was—I looked up, and that young girl was watching still, but her eyes fixed only on him. A spark had set her dress on fire ; she seemed as if her efforts to put it out were only instinctive, her whole mind and soul in the gaze she bent on the fight. It could not last long—we were all hewn or pushed from our saddles at last ; but dismounted, streaming with blood, his clothes cut through till they hung in rags—thank Heaven for the chance that made him that day wear a shirt of mail—many of us wear these, or captured cuirasses—else he would have been cut into mince-meat. As it was, I wonder he could stand, much less strike, for mere loss of blood. The enemy's second in command called to him—I think he guessed the truth, and pitied his desperation:—‘Yield, and quarter.’ He answered with a stroke that clove the man's head. And then—I did not see him borne down, for by that time I was senseless myself. When I came to my senses I saw what had happened. His orders had been obeyed ; our men had come up, and had surrounded the enemy on three sides ; the stream, with only one bridge, was on the other, and they were trying to escape by it. But Munford had brought two 12-pounders to bear on it with grape, and scarcely a man got across. Our horsemen were slaughtering the fugitives like sheep. Elsewhere the enemy were

fighting hard still, as ours pressed them back upon the blazing building and into the courtyard. I looked for him as soon as my eyes opened. At that moment he had just laid *her* down under a tree; a couple of slave-girls, our surgeon, and an assistant tending her, while a few men—their backs turned to the sight, and they were glad of it—were guarding her from any chance injury in the *melée* that surged up and down. They had been taken at a terrible disadvantage, half of them dispersed in plundering, and our dash had shattered their nerve. Those who could not escape were driven in, some three hundred of them pent in the courtyard; others howling for quarter, sabred, stabbed, shot down in the garden, on the terrace, under the very portico; and I heard him call: ‘Drive them back into the flames.’ One fellow, wounded already, called for pity, and one of our men would have spared him. I never heard the Colonel speak to a soldier as he spoke then.

“‘Mercy,’ he said, ‘to those who show no mercy even to women? Mercy to thieves and murderers? What if some are more guilty than their comrades? Kill all; be sure the Devil knows his own.’

“I can’t describe it, it was too horrible. Our men stood round, and as the Yankees tried to escape from the flames, he had them driven back at the point of the lance. Then, when the howling and yelling from within the building became fainter, when that business was well-nigh done, he came where Ballard lay. The felon was screaming, but was half silent with terror when, somehow or other, despite the wound that blinded him, he became aware of d’Ultra-

mar's approach—as if he had anything left to fear, except life. The Colonel seemed as if he would set his foot on the wretch's throat and trample out his soul; but he forbore, looking coolly for a minute on the hideous sight, and the yet more hideous terror of the scoundrel; utterly pitiless, for—he had seen *her* suffer. At last he spoke, with a scorn that seemed too cold for rage, and even for hatred. ‘You hound! if there were a spark of manhood in you, I would put you out of pain; I leave you the life of a crushed worm, to remind your fellows what such a scoundrel will suffer before he dares to die!’ Well, I don’t like to remember it; and you won’t care to hear any more.”

The Englishman had listened with more sympathy, perhaps, for the savage vengeance than the young Southerner who had actually seen it inflicted could feel.

“Any death a soldier could give was too merciful for such a hound. But what became of the girl?”

It was some moments before his companion could answer, and by that time they had crossed an intervening ridge, and reached a level so near the summit that from beyond they could just catch sight of a lurid glow on the darkening horizon to the West.

“More of the same work,” said the young Southerner. “Sheridan has been robbing, burning, wasting in this valley for several days and in the richest, happiest part of the Old Dominion there is scarcely anything left but the ashes of such part of the harvest as they could not carry away, and the brick chimneys of hundreds of peaceful homes, to

tell what the Valley was. Scores of women and children have found refuge in our camp and been escorted to distant places of safety. I don't wonder our men are savage. I only hope the Colonel's judgment will be too much for his temper; but if he sees a chance he will not lose it for want of daring, or fear of such reprimands as the Chief, Hampton, and FitzLee have given him a score of times. I suppose they sent him here because, if any man can and will read those fiends a lesson, it is he. . . . You asked what became of *her*. I could not see, could not know anything again till they carried me with our other wounded into our camp. She lingered a few days; and I was just able to stand when the Colonel's orderly—he is an East Indian soldier, an Arab he calls him, I don't know why—brought me a request, not command, to wait upon our chief. They had raised a hut of reeds and branches, and made it look quite neat, quite pretty for her. She lay—she did not seem to suffer much; I believe they had managed to wrap her from head to foot in cotton wool. But there was death in that sweet face; and yet it was so serene, so happy, and to the last her look into his eyes—well, I won't describe it. There was a priest there—I believe Colonel d'Ultramar is a Catholic—and when I and some dozen other officers had assembled, wondering for what, the Colonel knelt beside her and held her hand in his. His face was as much changed from what I knew it in the happier days as from what I had seen it on the march or in the field; soft, gentle as when I had seen him speak to women, but with a sad wistful tenderness you will

never believe it could have worn. He whispered a very few words; and, dying as she was, they called some little colour to her cheek. Then the priest began, and I became aware that it was the Marriage Service he was reading. When it was over, the Colonel bent and kissed her, and then stood up before us all and faced us as if we were on parade.

“ ‘You will bear witness,’ he said. ‘I owed justice, not for wrong done but for kindness and devotion received; and he who loves me as comrade and gentleman will draw sword or pistol whenever a doubt shall be hinted that touches ever so faintly the honour of my wife, the name of the Marquise d’Ultramar.’ ”

“At midnight, half a dozen officers of ours carried her to her grave in that lonely island among the swamps. He had contrived to have a stone cross prepared, roughly enough, but no doubt those graven letters will be as clear a hundred years hence as when I read them. They gave only her Christian name and married title, her age and the date.”

“I guessed the outline of your story,” said the Englishman, “when you first mentioned but did not name her. These startled his friends in England not a little.” He handed to his companion two small slips cut from a newspaper and carefully pasted on a folded card. “You cannot read them by this light, of course, but I remember every word. ‘On —, 1863, at the camp of the Louisiana Cavalry Legion, Lionel, Marquis d’Ultramar, Colonel C.S.A., to Florence, daughter of the late Mr. Dupont, of Minnaro, Louisiana,’ and, under the next heading, ‘Died’—with the same date—‘of injuries received in

the burning of her home by Federal incendiaries, Florence, Marquise d'Ultramar, aged 21.'"

"And since then," continued the Louisianian, "the one thought in his heart, his one care, his one wish seems to be for vengeance. You will see the weapon he carries, a long, heavy, straight two-edged sword, sharp as a razor (he will allow none but leathern scabbards); because, as he once said to me, keen as his sabre was and terribly as I have seen him use it, 'the sabre is too apt to disable, not to kill.' He will take any trouble to surprise and destroy marauders. I have known him dash many miles deep through the enemy's advanced posts, simply to avenge by the slaughter of a particular party some outrage that has come to his knowledge. Yet, before Minnaroo, he seldom drew sword or revolver but in self-defence; and even now he forbids, as he did from the first, the practice of 'potting' sentries when he don't intend an attack. But where he used to call it murder, now he only calls it 'unsoldierly.' About the end of the war, for victory or defeat, for fame or promotion, he does not seem to care; nay, he has refused promotion over and over again, and though he commands the full force of a brigade, he is only a colonel, as he was at the outset. But no man in our service has slain so many enemies with his own hand, no corps has a record of slaughter to be compared with ours. Four times my battalion has been thinned down to some three hundred or less; four times he has managed to fill the ranks up again; every desperado, every man too fierce for ordinary discipline, every youth too inexperienced to be content with the

ordinary duties of a soldier comes to him ; and yet the discipline of ours is the strictest in the service. The man would be bold indeed, and must take his life in his hand, who would question an order given in that voice, or face the look in those eyes that never lighten but when the bolt is ready. There they are," as they turned a corner and saw, in a sort of basin enclosed by the highest ridges of the hill and thus concealed from the observation of enemies in the valley, the bivouac fires of a somewhat extensive camp. As they approached the nearest of these the young Confederate held up his hand to check his comrade's pace. "Hark!" he said. "They would not sing that if he were here. He hates braggadocio, or what the Yankees call high-falutin', as you English do."

A chorus of soldierly voices broke forth in a regimental song, certainly open to the objection which the officer's last words had suggested :—

"Shout, for the wail affrighted!
 Shout, for the North's lament!
 For men through flames they lighted
 To flame eternal sent!
 Hurrah! the hounds of plunder
 Quail from the scourge of War;
 The Lancers' charge of thunder,
 The sword of Ultramar!

"Dogs! where the father's dwelling
 Blazed o'er the children's head,
 Told not your comrades' yelling
 How theft and murder sped?
 Through wildest storm of slaughter
 Rang out the cold stern tone :—
 'No flinching and no quarter;
 The Devil knows his own!'

"The flame our land that scorches
Your furthest homes shall feel,
Oft as the assassin's torches
Flash on the avenger's steel.
No soldier-grace to murder,
No ruth to arson shown—
Along that wasted border
'The Devil knows his own!'

"Limbers for flight the cannon,
The horsemen break and wheel,
Where glows the red-black pennon,
Where gleams the ice-grey steel.
The rifle shakes and quavers,
As burst on trench or square
The charge that never wavers,
The points that never spare!

"Save wrack of corpses gory
Flung where the war-tides blend,
None ever told the story
Who stayed to learn the end!
What in the mellay chances
Ask those who, flying far,
Looked back upon the lances
Led on by Ultramar!

"The ranks, unchecked that speed them
Through bullets, grape, and shell,
Unchecked, with him to lead them,
Would charge the gates of Hell.
Call Southern manhood hollow,
Call chivalry a weed,
When Lancers fear to follow,
Or Ultramar to lead!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE BIVOUAC.

“Vengeance, deep-brooding o’er the slain,
Had locked the source of softer woe.”

THE song ceased somewhat abruptly as a horse’s hoof-beats were heard, and into the circle of light cast by the great fire came a splendid powerful black stallion; bearing a rider who wore a uniform identical with that of the young officer before mentioned, save that the feathers were missing from the crest, and something scarcely distinguishable in that light but evidently of the common colours of the regiment, the suggestive red and black, was fastened around the upper part of the helmet. But the Englishman’s eye, accustomed to note with military promptitude accoutrements and weapons rather than mere ornaments of dress, observed the two large heavy “six-shooters” carried one in the holster and one in the belt, the long, straight, heavy sword belonging to a day when the sword had to cleave steel as well as flesh and bone, even more than the Victoria Cross, the Indian medal and ribbon, which seemed to afford so fair a guide to a Yankee rifle aimed at the heart. The horseman caught sight at once of the new-comers, looked for

half a minute with wonder and eagerness in the Englishman's face, and then riding forward frankly held out his hand in welcome.

"James!" he said heartily. "Of all men I know, hardly one I should be more glad to see here. But what in the world has brought you? Ours is the last camp to which curiosity should bring a traveller, and ours the last force a neutral should accompany."

"I ran the blockade to reach you, Colonel d'Ultramar," replied the stranger, who had accepted the hand-clasp with something of shyness, and when it was disengaged raised his right to his cap, as it were by force of habit, in military salute. "You may forget, I do not, what I owe to you. You first acknowledged me, a trooper in your regiment, as the gentleman I had been ten years before. Your selection, your confidence gave me the chance that restored me to that rank, that won for me my commission, and afforded me an opportunity of retrieving all errors by winning, after you left India, a reward which," he added, after a moment, his voice trembling with a depth of feeling seldom shown by Englishmen, "derives its chief value for me from the fact that you wear it also. I have neither wife nor child; I have resigned my commission as Captain in Her Majesty's Service, and, if you will have me, I come to ask leave to fight, I don't care if it be to die, beside you."

A cloud of something more than doubt or sadness—was it possibly of shame?—came over the features of the Confederate leader. But before he spoke they had settled back into the usual haughty, cold calm that befitted them almost as well as the kindlier;

brighter look to which the other had been accustomed. Only the long curls—suggesting a resemblance, marked if not striking, to the portrait of the best, noblest, and most slandered of Scottish Cavaliers—startled an eye accustomed to the strict uniformity of English military usages. Yet, at a second glance, they accorded well with other evidences whether of personal vanity or simply of the pride in dress and personal appearance hereditary among the old chivalry both of France and England, and encouraged no doubt in the wearer by the kind of foppery natural and common among young soldiers conscious of personal advantages.

“You shall share my supper,” he said, leading his guest a little apart to a spot where two or three rocks made a sort of half-sheltered privacy; a spot so evidently respected that, as the Englishman observed, throughout the evening no soldier, no officer except on duty approached near enough to overhear their low-toned conversation: “and we will talk over this matter. You see, James, you don’t know what you are asking. Enter into any other regiment in our service, I shall be glad that the Confederacy has gained a stout arm and a brave heart; and if you fall, it is the fortune of war.”

“A moment, Colonel,” interrupted the other. “I have brought something which I must ask your pardon for forgetting for an instant, in my gladness to see you again, and still more in the frank and friendly welcome you have given to one you met last with such an infinite distance between us; but which to you will be worth more than any comrade, were he fifty times a better man than I ever was or shall be.”

He drew forth as he spoke a small packet carefully wrapped in silk and oilskin, showing the bearer's anxious care for its security; and took from it a directed envelope, the white paper with its black edge as unsoiled as when he received it from the hand that had written the address. There was an almost hungry eagerness in the look with which the Southern soldier took it. He seemed about to raise it to his lips; it did not appear to be the presence of the bringer that checked the impulse; but he did not break the seal at once, rather laid it aside carefully, and it seemed almost reverently, as if something too sacred for hasty touch, while he turned to renew the conversation.

“I thank you; you could have brought me nothing more precious, whatever it may contain. But understand me, James. I dare say Captain Francis has told you something of the character I bear, and that my Legion bears, both in our service and with the enemy. Nothing but the good conduct of my men on twenty hard-fought fields would fully compensate for that with which I am best pleased—the ruthless unsparing vengeance we have wrought on those who have fired our homes and——” He paused abruptly, suppressing the bitter passion of his tone, and continued very quietly and coldly: “On principle, I never spare thieves or incendiaries taken red-handed, whether in or out of uniform. But this leads to revenge, and revenge provokes us to retaliate; till now, as we rarely give quarter, so we never ask or receive it. I don't know that they would murder prisoners of the Legion in cold blood; they have made none for

months. But in Louisiana, where I held a sort of independent command, B—— hanged a private of mine. I surprised one of their posts a few days afterwards, picked out three field-officers, the highest in rank I could catch, and left them hanging there. I sent back one—a mere boy—to tell their General of the reprisal, and to promise him that for every murder of the kind I would, cost what it might, inflict a similar threefold vengeance on the officers of highest rank in my power. Loathsome work ; but I think it a duty, while Lincoln commissions men that are neither soldiers nor gentlemen, and returns our demands for enquiry or redress with insult. Southern opinion is with me, I think, but our Government and Head-quarters won't act ; and now we are getting the worst of it, and far more Confederate prisoners are in their hands than Federals in ours ; besides which, I am too near one whom I dare not disobey to venture on making reprisals on my own account."

"Well," replied the Englishman, lightly, "all I have to care then is that, wounded or not, I don't fall alive into their hands. What do you expect if *you* do?"

"I?" said the Colonel, drawing a tiny quill from the lining of his collar. "In the time of uttermost danger—when we surrendered at the Residency—I gave this to one of those ladies for whose fate we, who looked forward so cheerfully to our own, were in such terror. She returned it to me on board the *Ava*. It will save me as effectually from Federal vengeance as it might——"

It seemed as if he could not even speak of such a possibility in connection with her he so revered.

“Sleep, then, if you can,” he added, after a few moments’ pause. “You may be awakened very soon and suddenly. My scouts are out at infinite peril closely watching the march of yonder felons, and, cost what it may, I will strike a blow if there be any chance.”

When left alone, the Confederate officer unfolded very slowly, and as it seemed half-apprehensively, the packet left with him. It contained only a single sheet of letter-paper, somewhat closely written, but with this a little round tablet of the thinnest ivory, carefully enfolded in tissue paper and gold leaf; on which he gazed long, fondly, eagerly before, drawing from his breast a locket in which already a tress of colour matching those of the portrait was folded, he secured the tiny miniature therein, and returned the locket to its hiding-place. The letter, dated nearly three months ago, ran as follows :—

Alice to Lionel.

“I hope, I trust, Lionel, that this may reach you safely by the hands of a former comrade, who, through Sir Philip Vane, asks ‘the best recommendation he can carry to you.’ He wears a better on his breast; the same Indian medal and Cross of Valour which, they say, make yours the mark of so many rifles. I must not beg you to be less daring; I am too proud of your fame; yet—may I not remind you that it is not only your life you take in your hand so often? If you really think ‘you can be spared,’ if you forget the many lives over which your loss would cast a lasting shadow, remember to what remorse and misery you

leave *me*, if you fall in a war in which, but for me, you would never have engaged; if, in that dreadful irreparable loneliness, I am to feel that I have driven you on your death; if all who love me for your sake, even Amy, are forced to think of me less as your betrothed than your murderess. Do you think I can ever forget *why* we are parted, why you are in peril? The thought makes my punishment almost greater than I can bear. I wake by night, again and again, to think with a start of terror what news the day may bring. The morning hours before the papers reach us are terrible in their long suspense; but when they come in I cannot open them: I can only watch Penrith's or Amy's face to read there the tidings I dare not ask. Amy is tenderness itself, is all your sister can be to your betrothed; she speaks and looks as if my anxiety deserved only the deepest, gentlest pity; but I feel that she can no more really forget—than I.

“My only consolation comes from your own considerate saying—from the remembrance that you thought life, and more than life, a cheap price for the Providential mercy that sent you to Minnaroo in the hour of need; and of this consolation *their* presence daily reminds me. Eva is my chief comfort; the more that she is so constant a care. What seemed at first only the shyness that shrinks from self-expression was, I found, the lost, bewildered feeling of one who missed the dearer half of herself. Those two seem never to have been apart by night or day: and it is strange to see how Eva can only think, feel, wish at second hand; ‘Florence would think, Florence would like.’ Missing that support, she clings to me as even

Helen never did. From her I gather much of your life at Minnaroo, and am glad to feel that I had not made it wholly desolate. They speak of you constantly, so frankly and naturally, with a simple sisterly affection too unconscious for gratitude, because it takes your utmost kindness and care for granted. Only Eugenie lets fall now and then a word that sounds as if she ought not to have shared that kindness: yet I should say she had been a favourite; the 'spoilt child' of your household in its earlier, happier days? For the last two years it seems that they have scarcely seen you, save for a flying visit once or twice, but when you were disabled and suffering so severely after the Kentuckian campaign. This may explain why she is hardly like your description; quiet, self-reliant, sensible rather than spirited; considerate and rather dutiful than grateful to Amy, with me somewhat reserved and distant. It pains me a little that she never speaks and will hardly let Rose speak of Florence, for I know from Amy that she feels acutely; is longing, pining for news of the sister they all love so dearly, who has evidently been so much to their orphan girlhood.

"I need not say how we all look and long for the tidings so strangely delayed. My letter must have shown only too plainly how anxiously I expect your reply, though I try to repress an impatience, a fear, which wrong you. I know it is, can be no neglect, no unkindness of yours; you would feel too deeply for—for all of us. We hear that many vessels have been captured lately, and that many of your ports are in Northern hands. But it is hard never to have heard

except that once. My uncle obtained a private pledge from Washington that none of the girls should be detained in any case ; but Lord L—— says it would be in vain to ask that your letters should be forwarded. Northern journals report you in the field again—that is all we know. But something must have gone wrong. Surely, if our letters arrived *in time*, before now Florence herself. . . .”

Thus far, if it trembled a little in the last few lines, Alice’s handwriting was clear, distinct, even, beautiful as ever ; beautiful and even as beseeemed that equable temper, that calm steady self-command he so deeply admired, and the womanly dignity as remarkable in her demeanour as her stainless loyalty, her feminine sweetness. But here she had been interrupted : haste, agitation, trouble, perhaps a certain conflict of feeling, were not less evident in the occasional wavering, the slightly uneven lines, the two or three blots, the blurred letters that almost looked as if tears had stained the paper, which deformed from this point to the close the beauty of the regular, rounded, exquisitely formed characters.

“ So far I had written when the brief, formal announcements in the Charleston *Mercury* reached us, followed by your note from the camp. I cannot tell you how I have grieved, have cried over her fate ; how I feel that I should have been with you to share, if I could not comfort, your terrible sorrow. Of her sisters’ anguish I can say nothing but this—it proves what she must have been to them, and helps me to understand what you must suffer. Do not think I regret what you have given her, or doubt that you

did well. Florence deserved all that could honour her memory, all that could comfort the last hours of a life so beautiful, so short, so fearfully troubled. Do not take amiss what I must add. You know I shall be sorry to hurt or grieve you; but I should be false if I let you think that this is all I feel, and—Lionel, I cannot bear that you should always, as I fear you always have done, so overrate me, fancy me so much nobler than I am. I cannot put aside your words as mere lover's flattery; I think you would not believe me capable of enjoying flattery, if you could stoop to be insincere. So I had rather, even if it hurt you as well as lower me in your eyes, that you should know what I am half ashamed to own. It is not that I would have denied to Florence the affection you must have given her as long as she had lived, or the place she must now hold in your memory. But—do not blame me too much for wishing that she had not had so clear, so terrible a right to the *name* that I could not bear to give to any other. Is it not natural? Can it ever be quite so much my own as if it had not been first given to her, and so given that it must always remind us of her? Forgive me; I can grudge nothing to her of whom Eugenie said, 'Lady Penrith, if you ever see your brother again, it will be because Florence went back.' I do not, I never will ask anything that it might pain you to tell, even to me. Let me believe, if possible, that to your heart as to mine our engagement has never been broken; that I have never lost the right I can never bear to forego to write myself ever, come what may, your own—ALICE."

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE VALLEY.

“Sound, I say, the charge at venture;
’Tis not naked steel we fear.
Better perish in the *melée*
Than be shot like driven deer.”

A STRONG brigade of Federal cavalry were moving, through the closing twilight which mingled with the rays of the rising moon, along the upper part of the Shenandoah Valley. The main body was many miles to their front; but, no strong Confederate force being supposed to threaten the flank of the ravaging army, this rear-guard was thought powerful enough to ensure its own safety. Thus, observing the usual precautions, it moved without uneasiness, though the delays incident to the duties of its position were likely to throw it every hour further and further from its comrades, of whose operations its leaders saw the traces at almost every mile.

“I don’t like this work,” said the commander to a young officer who rode beside him. “Right enough to carry off whatever can be useful to ourselves, to destroy whatever might afford supplies to the enemy. But burning defenceless houses, driving women and children from their homes by the score, is mere

wanton cruelty; and such utter vandalism as the destruction of colleges, college libraries, public archives, outrages all the laws of civilized warfare and of common sense."

"You need hardly be so tender for rebels, General," returned the other. "England was not very scrupulous in putting down the Indian Mutiny, nor, if report speak true, very lenient in her dealings with your own countrymen some seventy years ago."

"Rebels? Well, that is your affair as an American, rather than mine as a soldier of fortune. But it seems to me that nearly every man on both sides fights for his own State; and look here, didn't you threaten to secede yourselves, to get rid of that infernal scandal, the Fugitive Slave Law? And didn't Virginia reserve the right to secede when she joined the Union? If so, by what law are her citizens rebels? Could not she hang them for high treason if they fought against her? At any rate we cannot decently claim the right to treat as rebels, so far at least as the rules of war are concerned, those from whom we constantly receive flags of truce, and with whom till lately we conducted regular exchanges. And if Davis chose to order reprisals, how should we feel then?"

"They have been savage enough sometimes," returned the other, "if all tales are true. The massacre at Minnaroo was worse than anything we have done."

"They report," returned the Irish officer, a strong, tall, erect, soldierly man of middle age, wearing the insignia of a Brigadier General and one or two Orders

which told of service under more Sovereigns than one, of distinction earned in more than one quarter of the globe ; “ they report that d’Ultramar is not far from us now. If our scouts told us truly, the red and black facings were seen among the dead in the last skirmish ; and Winthrop told me in confidence that Sheridan had received information that d’Ultramar had been sent in this direction with his command.”

“ And you have kept it from our men ? Well, you may be right ; the utter recklessness of their chief, the ferocious fury of the men, picked, they say, from half the Confederacy as the most vindictive or the most desperate spirits of the South, have scared ours not a little. Our soldiers will face the ordinary dangers of battle ; but they don’t like the idea of an enemy who neither gives nor takes quarter. I was present when, in one of the skirmishes on the line of the Rapidan, after the Rebels had made one of their raids into our rear, we cut to pieces a troop of the Legion that were surprised and intercepted in their retreat. They fought literally like devils. They got their backs against the steep, wall-like bank of a stream, having dismounted when they saw that escape was impossible. They lined the bank at the bottom of the slope on our side, and went on firing into us, as if their only thought was to kill us, and being killed of no consequence whatever. Half of them had been shot before we came within pistol range, and nearly all their ammunition was exhausted. But when we closed upon the remainder, ten to one, they stood and fought with clubbed carbine, lance, or sabre,

man by man. One fellow, with one leg broken and the other disabled by a flesh-wound, sat deliberately firing into us with his revolver, and when we closed upon him cut at our knees, fighting like a frantic badger. Another, lying helpless and half senseless on the ground as our men trod over him, contrived to raise himself and drive the end of his broken lance into the bowels of an officer, picking him out deliberately; and not one, however badly wounded, asked quarter, or even spared to make his death certain by shooting and stabbing to the last."

"And," said another of the General's immediate staff, who had hitherto been listening in silence, "when they caught half our convoy at —— they had hemmed it in front and rear, right and left, so that none could escape, and they cut down not only the escort but the very drivers and commissaries. In Louisiana it was reported that a price, ten thousand dollars they said, had been put on their Colonel's head. If it were true I suppose the Government rebuked it, for B—— never avowed it. But it cost us dear. D'Ultramar heard of it—he is splendidly served by scouts and spies—and one day a negro told Colonel Mather, of the 160th Massachusetts, that he could guide him to cut off the rebel Colonel and a squadron of his Legion. Mather was much wronged if he did not care as much for money as for fame or service. He followed the guide with his whole regiment, taking, however, the precautions any man of sense would do in front of such an enemy. He came upon the squadron as he expected. They were overpowered and fled at once, and he pursued at full speed for

many miles. D'Ultramar was really there; and if he had set a trap, one would have thought he would not make himself part of a bait sure in any event to be so terribly mauled. Suddenly Mather found himself in an open space, some half-mile square, surrounded by swamps and impassable streams and jungles. Then the fugitives turned, and two more squadrons dashed out in front to support them; a fire being poured in at the same time from every bunch of reeds, every tree, every bit of ground that could give cover to a single man. About one-fourth of the regiment cut their way out by the route by which they had entered; even that was all but effectually closed: the rest perished to a man."

"One has heard," said the other officer, "a dozen tales like that; and certainly, General, if you want to keep ours on the alert you should tell them who is near. The very name of that Legion—ugly as it is, it is pretty well deserved—would keep the sleepest patrol's eyes and ears open."

The conversation was interrupted, a horseman from the advanced party riding at full speed up to the General.

"The enemy are in front, General, about a mile forward, and in force."

"What force?" asked his commander, calmly.

"Cavalry; perhaps twelve hundred. I was to tell you, General, that they seem to know of our approach, and were wheeling across the road with their right upon the river—and there is no ford upon this side of them—about half a mile beyond yonder farm which is still burning."

A very few minutes sufficed to form the whole of the Federal rear-guard in line. Sweeping round some rough wooded ground, immediately between their left and the bank of the Shenandoah, which concealed from their sight all but the smoke of the conflagration, they came at once in sight of the blazing dwelling and offices, some two hundred yards to their right front; and of a line of horsemen about as far to the northward of the scene of havoc, on whose forms, chargers, and equipments the bright light fell full and clear, relieving them signally against the darkness behind. All recognized the red and black facings on the grey ground of the uniforms, and, a little in front of the line and carried beside a single horseman—who sat erect and motionless on a somewhat restless black charger, nearly a hand higher than any of those behind him—the Confederate flag; a silken banner unusually large and perfect, with the azure saltire, its gleaming silver stars and silver border, on the crimson ground, and surrounding all a significant broad edging of black crape. A strange hoarse sound, half perhaps murmur of soldierly interest in encountering a famous and formidable enemy, half cry of panic, ran along the Federal front—

“The Devil’s Own! The Devil’s Own!”

“Steady,” cried their chief. “Remember, they cannot charge through our fire. There is no time to dismount,” he muttered to the nearest officer; “we must fire from horseback. Unslung your rifles; take good aim. By George!”—this to himself—“they *will* charge! Second rank, reserve your fire. Front

rank," as the enemy dashed forward at a rapid pace, but preserving their dressing with wonderful perfection on the smooth unbroken turf, "front rank, fire!"

The Confederates, exposed to the full effect of a volley fired with disciplined steadiness, were almost shaken. Their ranks were broken up by the fall of men, the floundering of wounded horses, the breaking away of many chargers sharply reined to right or left, or struck with the spur by their reeling or unconscious riders. For a moment it seemed that they would waver, would halt, and lose the whole advantage of that impetus to gain which they had submitted to receive, without anticipating or returning, the discharge. But their leader's voice rang out clear and calm, heard from end to end of either line—

"Now, men, don't break your pace; follow me steadily. Charge!"

With that half-conscious irresistible habit of obedience to command and example which it is the especial purpose and effect of discipline to impress upon the soldier, which gives to disciplined troops their almost incalculable advantage, the Confederates obeyed; and broke with the full force of that tremendous gallop upon the halted line of their opponents. The Federal Chief had trusted, reasonably enough, to the effect of the fire, which had emptied at least one-fifth of the enemy's saddles. Few troops can stand such a shock; but on the other hand none, mounted or dismounted, could possibly resist the momentum of that furious charge when once their fire had failed to break it. Almost every man of the first Federal rank went down, pierced by the lance, or

sent horse and all to the ground by the mere collision. Sabres were drawn and blows exchanged in another moment in personal conflict with the horsemen of the second rank, who in the confusion had delivered their volley almost without effect, and were behind-hand, though but by some ten seconds, it might be, in drawing the swords they had seldom had occasion to use. Driven back into this line, the Federal General found himself individually confronted with him who had led the attack. A thoroughly brave man and practised soldier, he was nevertheless conscious at once of the advantage his assailant derived from the height of his steed and the length and weight of his weapon, and endeavoured to close and thrust at the heart. He might have prevailed, might at any rate have held his own till the defeat or flight of those around him brought upon him more than one antagonist, but that, suddenly dropping his rein on the neck of his fiery steed, which stood at once perfectly still with down-bent head—the position safest for himself and most convenient to his rider—the Confederate Colonel drew his revolver with the left hand as he parried the sabre with the other. Shot through the brain, the General fell at once and heavily to the ground. His fall completed the discouragement of his men; and the Confederate leader had opportunity to deal but a few heavy blows to right and left before the second rank was as utterly broken and shattered as the first, though with less loss of life. The victors, forbidden to pursue, made short work of such as remained within their reach; and more than half the vanquished were left for dead. Before ten minutes had elapsed from

the first fire the work was done; the Confederate line, terribly thinned, was re-formed, those of their wounded who could sit in the saddle had been remounted, and the rest were carried in advance, each by four dismounted comrades, while the force wheeled and fell back, as quickly as this incumbrance permitted, towards the mountains dimly visible in the moonlight.

“That comes,” said Lionel to his new volunteer, who rode beside him, “of burning, plundering, and outrage. But for those I should hardly have received the exact, detailed information that has kept me aware for many days of every movement of the enemy; that enabled me to judge exactly where this rear-guard would be found, how strong it was, and how far from the main body. Happily atrocities of this kind repay themselves in a measure, making every non-combatant, every woman and child in an invaded district not merely an enemy but a spy, willing to risk, at need to give, life for vengeance. But such blows must be calculated very closely, and dealt very quickly, against such an enemy as Sheridan. If those men could have stood for two hours, the chances are that before we got away we should have had a whole division on our rear.”

The Confederate leader did not seem, to his companion's practised observation, very certain that this might not yet happen. His precautions indicated extraordinary vigilance; and at last, as they neared the mountains, he rode himself to visit the party guarding the left rear, the point nearest the enemy. He had not ridden five minutes with the half-troop on duty in this quarter when his quick, ever-attentive ear

caught the sounds of a horse's feet. "One, and at full gallop," he said to the Lieutenant beside him. In another minute the stranger came within the distance at which in the moonlight a single figure could be distinguished; and, with an exclamation of great surprise, the Colonel rode forward to meet a young girl, almost a child, bonnetless, habitless, and riding as he noted an unsaddled steed, half horse, half pony. She reined up promptly, and ordering his men to proceed, Colonel d'Ultramar rode by her side a little in their rear.

"Very bravely and kindly done, Miss Everett," he said. "I am glad to see you, whatever news you bring; it shows that my fears when you returned before were exaggerated."

The girl's face flushed painfully, and her lips set closely over the clenched teeth.

"I paid for it," she said. "But see here, Colonel. General Sheridan has heard the fate of his rear-guard. He will turn back upon you; the order was given to start at the earliest twilight, and they know where your camp was last night."

"Thanks," he answered. "Is that all?"

"All I know; but I think he sent an orderly off to the eastward."

"I suppose, then, there is no enemy between us and their head-quarters, except fugitives of the brigade we shattered this evening?"

"I met none, and I don't think there are any."

He halted his men, giving them orders that would bring them nearer to the main body, which they were to rejoin at a given point, directed a patrol to

the rear with minute instructions, and then turned again to his young companion.

“You must not go back this time; it is too dangerous. They would hardly hang a girl, but you are a spy by their law.”

“I don’t mean to go back,” she answered, in a tone whose bitterness of passion, not of fear, he recognized at once.

“Then,” he said, “I must send you with our wounded to ——. For their sake, I mean to be pursued. They must take a new direction; and take this, you will need it, and you have earned it nobly.”

He held out his *portemonnaie*, evidently not very well stocked, as he spoke. The girl, however, refused it peremptorily but courteously.

“No, Colonel. No Virginian would refuse me shelter, or take money for giving it. But”—hesitating a little—“if you think I have served you well, will you do me one favour?”

“Any that I can, Miss Everett. You have deserved well not only of our force but of the Confederacy; and I will take care, whether I survive the night or not, that the President is made aware of it.”

“No,” she said, “I beg you never to mention my name. I could not bear”—she checked herself. “But——”

“Well, what is it I can do for you? Remember, I owe it you, whatever it cost.”

“You will promise not to name me? Well, then, . . . you know General Venn, the renegade Kentuckian? He commands a brigade of infantry attached to Sheridan’s force. If you have the chance, don’t make him prisoner; kill him.”

The soldier whose hand had never spared in battle, whose merciless vengeance was a bye-word with both armies, started at the request, and looked closely into his young companion's face. Whatever it was that he read there by the doubtful light, caused him in natural courtesy to avert his eyes as he answered, quietly and simply—

“I will try. If he comes under my own hand, or under the rifles of my men, I will do my best to silence him for ever. That is your wish?”

She bent her head in assent, and as by this time they had rejoined the main body of his force, the Confederate leader escorted her to the head of those who were charged to convey the wounded to a place of safety, in a direction remote from that pursued by the Legion; and commended her especially to the care of the officer in command, but, as the latter observed, without naming her.

The faintest twilight was perceptible in the East as the Confederate cavalry entered a long winding pass through the Blue Ridge Mountains, which once traversed in safety would bring them within easy reach of support; beyond whose further entrance they were not very likely to be pursued. The Colonel, riding a little in front of his advanced guard, reconnoitring in person as under perilous circumstances he always chose to do, was surprised to see a boy not more than twelve years old start up from the shelter afforded by a rock. He had so placed himself that the utmost vigilance of a careful patrol would probably have failed to observe him.

“Are you,” he asked, “one of the Devil's Own?”

“I command,” Lionel replied, “the force to which our enemies give that name.”

“Then,” said the boy, “listen a minute, and don’t let your men go on.”

“Halt!” cried the Colonel. “Ride back, Johnson, and tell Pereiro to halt the main body. Now, what is it?”

“You know Randall’s Farm? He is my father. He sent me to warn you the enemy came there about two hours ago, about twelve hundred infantry and eight guns. They are lying in wait for you.”

“Trapped!” murmured the soldier to himself. “We can’t turn back. Before we were well in the Valley we should have Sheridan upon us; and to break through—— Who commands?”

“General Venn,” replied the boy. “But listen, Colonel. My father told me that, if you will give him a signal, he will set fire to the whole place, barns, stacks, house and all. That will throw them into confusion, and you may break through them.”

“Offered like a Virginian! Do you know how to give him the signal?”

“Yes.”

“Very well. Now tell me, is there any path by which a part of our force could come upon their flank or rear—any way either for cavalry or infantry? You see, I want to hide them for a little while, so that they shall strike an unexpected blow from another direction at the same moment that we charge in front. Half an hour before we do that, the torch should be lighted.”

“I think I understand,” the child replied. “Half

a mile above the farm there is a ridge, very rough, and behind which I could hide a hundred men conveniently. It don't show much, don't look like a hiding-place from below; and the path from here is very bad, but I have ridden it and walked it too."

"Good. Now you know if they catch you——"

"They'll hang me," said the boy. "All right."

"Well, guide there the men I will send with you. When you get there, make the signal to your father in your own way. When we see the flames break out, we shall attack. How far from the house is the last turn that will conceal us?"

"Not quite a quarter of a mile," answered the intelligent and thoughtful child. "But they are sure to have a post there."

"Yes; I don't mind that. I don't reckon on a surprise, but I want to know how far we must ride through their fire."

He rode back to his men and detached a troop to follow the guidance of the child, who rode on their leader's saddle; then moved forward slowly with the remainder of his force in three divisions. His orders had been given minutely and with the fullest recollection of ground he had previously traversed. Just before sunrise a brilliant blaze shot up a couple of miles in their front.

"That is our signal! Trot!"

The first squadrons moved forward quickly, closely followed by the others till they came in sight of the enemy's outposts. The picket, not intended to hold the position, and desperately alarmed by the unexpected conflagration which had thrown their com-

rades into no little confusion, broke and ran for their lives. The Confederate advance wheeled round the corner, formed at once in line, and saw straight before them a long line of rifles, crowded, however, into some confusion by the conflagration which raged on their left; one blaze of light, extending, as it seemed at a hasty glance, over some six acres, and rendering the position of any troops posted in that quarter untenable. The Confederate leader looked for the guns, but failed to see them till, as he gave the signal to charge, the hastily formed infantry instead of firing broke to right and left, disclosing the battery in their immediate rear.

“I have done right, then,” thought the Colonel. “Men, never mind the slaughter. Charge and follow me!”

They dashed forward with a promptitude and rapidity, unchecked by the sight of the guns, which the enemy had not anticipated. A tremendous volley from eight pieces tore through their ranks and veiled the scene in smoke, hiding the effect of the discharge from the gunners themselves.

“Quick, load again!” cried the artillery officer. “Send ’em all to the Devil before they can rally.”

“Slay and spare none! the Devil knows his own!” was the startling answer, as through the veil of smoke, to the utter astonishment and consternation of those who had expected to stop the charge by terror if not by actual slaughter, the well-known black charger of the Confederate leader dashed into their midst, followed by some threescore of his men. Half the gunners were cut down before they could recover

themselves ; the others fought desperately. Had they run, they would for once have done more wisely, the close intermingling of friend and foe hindering the fire of the infantry on either flank. Scores of these, however, rushed in to partake in the hand-to-hand conflict, and the small body of Confederates were surrounded and outnumbered by five to one. They fought with their usual desperate reckless fire and fierceness, rallying around their leader, who, dropping as was his wont at such close quarters the reins on his horse's neck, the revolver in his left hand, the sword in his right, had piled around him a ghastly heap of dead. One-third of their number were dismounted and disabled before they became aware that the enemy's courage was failing, the force of the attack slackening. The second and third squadrons had charged, as directed, upon the infantry to either side of the battery ; and the Federals on the left, afraid of being driven back into the flames, fired but one ill-aimed volley and then fled in confusion. Their more numerous comrades on the right fired more steadily and with terrible effect, and then stood firm with the bayonet. But the right squadron of the Confederates—wheeling on its left and, having once scattered the force opposed to it, sparing to pursue them—charged on the rear of the wing that still held its ground ; at the same time that the detachment in ambush swept down, well guided through the flames by the youthful scout, upon the now uncovered flank of the battery. At their Captain's command two-thirds of them dismounted, advanced with loaded carbines into the very thick of the strife, and finally

ended the resistance at that point by a volley fired within a score of yards into the rear of the defenders. Then those Federal soldiers who had still stood fast found their position utterly hopeless. Those on the extreme right fled and scattered on the hillside; the rest were cut down almost to a man. As the Confederate Colonel extricated himself from the *melée* now almost ended, he saw among the fugitives a mounted officer, in whom he guessed at once the General so specially commended to his attention. Turning to a gaunt Texan beside him, whose sword's edge was broken, bent and notched till useless, who held but a broken half of his lance, but who carried a large coil of leather thong at his saddle-bow, he said: "Follow me, we'll catch that General."

The runaway, however, had gained such a start that on the rough ground Lionel's powerful stallion, fatigued by the long night's work, could not overtake him. Motioning with a silent gesture to the Texan, the latter, pressing forward to the uttermost, flung his lasso; and in another instant the fugitive, half throttled, was hurled from his saddle and dragged over stones and through mire to the feet of the Confederate Colonel; who, snatching his comrade's broken lance, sprang down and held it at the throat of the fallen man. At the same moment, "Brought him in, Colonel d'Ultramar," said the Texan, saluting.

The captive struggled to disengage the noose round his throat as the victorious chief sprang to the ground. He had risen to his knees and, catching the name, cried, "Quarter, mercy, Colonel d'Ultramar! My name is Venn; you remember my nieces——"

With the broken butt of the lance Lionel struck the suppliant in the mouth, a blow that levelled him with the ground, and set his heel heavily on his throat.

“Dare you appeal to that memory, miser and dastard? For that reason alone I would rid the earth of such a cur. But there is another.” As he spoke he held the lance point within six inches of the doomed man’s eye. “I promised a young lady, you can guess whom, if I ever met with you to deal with you—thus.”

He paused long enough to see a flush of shame struggling with the pallid terror of the victim’s face, to let him taste the full bitterness of death, and then drove the point steadily and heavily home into the brain. In another moment the trumpet sounded to mount and re-form, and a patrol galloped in from the rear.

“Sheridan’s advanced guard are ascending the hill at the other end of the pass, Colonel.”

“I thought so. We have not a moment to lose. Mr. Randall,” to the farmer; “catch horses for yourself and your boy, and come with us. You must not stay. Men, help all who can ride into their saddles; we can do nothing for the rest.”

A look of bitter intense pain came over the stern cold face as he spoke; and James, watching him linger to the last, catching the look of longing regret he cast back upon the wounded comrades he was compelled to abandon, understood the strong affection that mingled with the awe and admiration their young commander’s courage, skill, and stern discipline

had inspired among his followers. Of nearly twelve hundred men who shared the charge that scattered the Federal rear-guard the night before, scarce two-thirds followed the colours down the Eastward slope of the Blue Ridge; and of these no small proportion were so wounded that only by a desperate effort, in many cases only by the aid of their comrades, could they keep the saddle.

CHAPTER XVII.

MYSTERY.

“ Which forerun
The darkness of that battle in the West,
Where all of high and holy dies away.”

It was the morning of the 7th April, 1865, the morning of her twenty-fifth birthday; her chamber in Penrith Castle, looking to the West, was still almost dark, as Alice Kavanagh woke with a start, and sitting up, gazed around her with a look as if seeking something she at once longed and feared to behold. A gentle touch called her attention to the companion who lay beside her, and had apparently awakened almost at the same moment as herself. Eva, of whom she had taken the same close, personal, tender charge that Lionel had asked for one who could hardly have needed it more, was trembling with an evident agitation for which even a dream as vivid as her own had been would scarcely, thought Alice, account; and the habit of protection, the desire of calming Eva, diverted her mind for the moment from the idea, whatever it was, that had so disturbed herself. She noticed—it was a very trifle, but she observed it with

a sort of shudder—that her companion's arm, as the momentary touch was timidly withdrawn, lay outside the soft down quilt that covered them, as if its warmth on that mild morning had been excessive.

“Alice!” the young girl almost gasped. “Oh dear! I dreamt . . . was it a dream? it was so clear, so real. Did you touch me, my hand, before I touched you?”

“I think not,” the elder lady answered, soothingly. “I was wakened myself by a vivid and rather painful dream.”

“Ah, then, it was so!” Eva said with a tremulous sigh. “Miss Kavanagh—Alice—you dreamt . . . was it not the same?”

“Not at all likely,” Alice answered, trying to speak with a composure and levity she did not feel. “What was it, Eva?”

“He,” faltered the younger girl, looking up into her companion's face and reading there the expression that belied her assumed indifference,—“Colonel d'Ultramar, I mean. You have seen him?” as Alice shivered and turned pale at a name that might more naturally have called the colour into her cheeks.

“Yes,” she said at last, taking Eva's hand in hers. “I did. Don't be frightened; it was natural we should both dream of him. You could not but think of one you knew so well, had so much reason to like, at such a time as this. And for me——”

“But it was no dream: we should not have dreamed alike. Tell me yours . . . only . . . I saw so little; but you were both standing beside me, and he stooped and kissed my hand, and that woke me.”

Alice's face grew graver but perhaps calmer as she listened.

"It is strange. Then I suppose it *was* something more than a mere dream. Well, Eva, I thought that I turned suddenly; I was conscious, as we seldom are in sleep, where I was and that you lay beside me; and looking up I saw him standing by the mantelpiece, close by yonder crucifix of yours and his own miniature. I noticed even the uniform you have so often described; but, as if the coat were parted, I saw under it a gleam like that of steel or silver."

"Ah!" said Eva, with something between a shudder and a sob, "he and many of his men wear a breastplate or shirt of mail. They are laughed at for it; but he said his horsemen were meant for close fighting, not for firing at a distance. You would not know that; that shows you it was real."

"I am not sure," Alice answered. "You may have told me of it before, though I did not think what it was. Well, all was so vivid that I was startled at first, and," she added, with a faint shadow of a smile, "shocked almost, as if he had no business there. But in a moment I was standing beside him; and, as you say, he came forward and kissed your hand, looking up at me as he did so, as if I might . . . It reminded me of something that happened in India. Then we passed into the next room, and stood together, looking at your sisters. I felt that I had led him there to take leave of 'the children'; and that Eugenie would be so grieved not to have seen him. Suddenly I heard a trumpet or bugle sound, once; a clear distinct call. I did not know what it meant;

but I felt that it was his own, and that he heard and understood it. I said, 'Kiss them, and go; you will be late.' But he turned to me instead, and . . . Somehow the whole scene was so real, so present, so clear to me that I was startled, thinking of the place and time and . . . and I shrank back for a moment. I just saw the look—such bitter pain, such sad, unreproachful resignation—in his countenance; and then . . . he was gone; and I heard, on the turf of the park, the sound of a horse's hoofs at full gallop."

"It was no dream," Eva said, emphatically. "I saw him just as you saw him; I felt the touch of his lips on my hand, and that startled me into waking; and you were standing beside him just as you say. Alice, do you remember your dress?"

Alice half smiled, half coloured. "Not in the least; it was not likely; except at the last moment. Then I thought I must be—but I never saw or noticed it."

"You were in black," murmured Eva; "in crape. I observed that; and——"

Her overstrained feelings relieved themselves in a passionate outburst of tears. It might have been well for Alice, far stronger but far more sorely tried, and almost as deeply impressed by what she struggled to explain as mere coincidence or dismiss as superstition, if she could have found a similar relief. She was pale, trembling, as she came down unusually late to the breakfast table where, fortunately for her self-command, only the family were gathered; and Amy observed, with a painful feeling for which she could

not account to herself, that on this day—an epoch of some natural interest in her life—Alice wore not actual mourning, but a black dress scarcely less sombre than those which the three sisters had not yet discarded, and had laid aside every ornament but one. That one conveyed no shade of relief to Amy's mysterious discomfort. It was a ring which, as one of the few cherished heirlooms retained by a family so often ruined and plundered, she had herself transferred to her brother's betrothed; telling Alice, as she placed it on her finger, that it had been for generations the "engagement ring" of the brides of the Darcies of Ulswater. It was a strange one; a hoop of six large choice pearls, with a black one of exceptional magnificence in the centre. To-day it reminded Amy that Alice was the seventh lady who had worn it, and wore it as the gift of the last heir of the line; and she noticed the coincidence with the strange thrill that is excited by an "evil omen."

But intimate as was their relation, close and dear friends as they had been ever since Amy's marriage, Alice was not one to be easily or lightly questioned where her feelings were involved; and it was from Eva, despite a half-promise to preserve her companion's confidence, that Lady Penrith learnt the strange coincidence of the dreams, and the painful significance attached to it by both. It impressed her more than she would have liked to own; the more so that she shrank from communicating it to her husband, whose cool practical sense would have given it some mere physical interpretation not wholly agreeable to her feelings. She noticed with earnest

compassionate interest the efforts that Alice made to seem cheerful throughout the day; which would have made greater calls on her energy and spirits but that, in the extremely precarious situation of him to whom she was betrothed—a betrothal which notwithstanding, or perhaps in consequence of, his objection she had allowed to become generally known—it had been arranged that all festivity, all presence of strangers should be avoided.

The family gathered in the evening in Amy's boudoir. Eugenie and Rose, from whom the painful secret had been kept, had at her request seated themselves at the piano; for Amy felt that music might conceal from themselves that shrinking from conversation which—natural as it was to the occasion and to the anxiety that weighed more or less heavily on all—the effort to talk would only render more apparent. Lacking Eva's sweet voice, the younger girls naturally turned to the Confederate war-songs in which they felt a patriotic pride and sympathy; and presently, after a whisper to her sister, Eugenie turned round.

“You will like this, perhaps, Lady Penrith. It was a favourite with Colonel d'Ultramar; I fancy it was his own, though he would never admit it.”

“His often-routed Roundhead boors when Cromwell strove to bring
To face the gallant gentlemen who fought for Church and King,
The law that nerved the Puritan to conquer or to die
Was ‘put your trust in God, my lads, and keep your powder dry.’

“Soon learned Prince Rupert's chivalry the value of the spell;
’Twas proved where Londonderry fought—’twas felt when Limerick
fell.
And never soldiers' hearts or thews have failed a chief whose eye
Avouched at need his trust in God, and kept the powder dry.

“Scoffers, who ne’er faced gleam of steel, nor bent the knees in
prayer,
May laugh to scorn the soldier-trust belied by soldier-care.
But ne’er did veteran chief of men the worth of faith decry,
Nor ever leader trusted God but kept the powder dry.

“Who honours Nature’s Lord reveres the law through Nature given,
That human mind by human might works out the ends of Heaven.
Through man the God of Sinai spoke; as Man He came to die;
And whoso trusts the Lord of Hosts will keep the powder dry.

“‘Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God;’ so answered He who
held
The powers of Nature in His hand: that word the Tempter quelled.
Let fanatic or charlatan call lightning from the sky;
Alone he trusts aright in God who keeps his powder dry.

“Not in the tempest or the flame, the shock when earth did quake,
But in the still small Voice at last the God of Battle spake.
He fires the heart that nerves the arm; breathes courage firm and
high;
Give me the men who trust in Him—I *know* the powder’s dry.”

Amy had asked and the girls had commenced a softer and less suggestive if somewhat mournful ballad, when Amy observed that Alice seemed to have sunk into something more than mere reverie; appeared absolutely unconscious of what was passing around. Her eyes were half-closed, her figure perfectly motionless. Was she sleeping? On that supposition Amy raised her hand to request silence as the song came to an end. The clock struck the hour before midnight, and Eugenie suddenly exclaimed, “I suppose it is near sunset now in Virginia?” Was it that name that had roused Alice? Amy started as she heard a voice that was Alice’s, and yet whose tone and accent seemed almost as a stranger’s; while the lady herself sat still, strangely still, but with intensest passion of terror and eagerness visible in her working features.

“Lionel, no !” she exclaimed. “It is sheer madness ! Oh, horrible !” after a few minutes’ pause. “But he has come out alive. Ah, but how few ! . . . Oh ! they have blown it up, and they cannot, they cannot escape ! They are lost !”

All present were appalled. Even Lord Penrith for the moment so lost his usual calm self-possession that the idea of waking the somnambulist, which, however unwise, would have been his first impulse in an ordinary state of feeling, never occurred to him. Alice sank into quiet and stillness for a while, and when her uncle at last aroused himself and would have gone up to her, Amy interposed ; instinctively fearing the effect of any interference in so strange and abnormal a state. After a few minutes more, with a violent start, and changing her attitude, previously relaxed and drooping, for one strangely erect and rigid, the entranced maiden cried again, in the same sharp tone of agonized terror and entreaty—

“Lionel, surrender, surrender ! It is but throwing away your life—and theirs. . . . Oh ! for *my* sake ! . . . Ah, spare him, spare him, Count ! Make prisoners, don’t kill. . . . Ah ! he is gone . . . no. . . . Ah ! the brave horse ! it will save him yet. . . . There ! hold fast, hold fast ! Oh !—you have let go !” . . .

The last words, notably commonplace as they seemed, were uttered in a tone of uttermost horror, half-reproachful, and yet of misery too deep for reproach : thought Lord Penrith, as a woman might speak who saw a suicide committed under her eyes while powerless to interfere. Every cheek in the room was white as death ; the ladies, with one exception,

trembling so violently that none had the physical strength, had they commanded at that moment the judgment and presence of mind, to act. Eugenie only, pale as the rest, but with compressed lips and an expression of resolve as well as of awe in her bright eyes, had reached the sufferer's side as she fell into violent convulsions ; displaying greater promptitude and nerve than even Lord Penrith himself, who, however, followed instantly an example he could hardly have set. Together they raised Alice and carried her to her room ; Amy and Eva with extreme difficulty recovering themselves so far as to follow, and undertake the charge Lord Penrith left to them when he quitted the chamber to send instantly for the local practitioner.

With the perversity of "common sense," he gave to the adviser he called in no further hint of the mental agony that had preceded and probably produced the physical convulsions, than was contained in the simple statement that the patient had seemed asleep, and speaking in her sleep of her betrothed ; of whose position in the then greatly imperilled Confederate army the medical attendant of the family was of course not unaware. The latter, however, was something of a philosopher, a man of wider general culture than country practitioners are wont to acquire ; and after prescribing remedies which might quell physical excitement and give such help to recovery as enforced rest might afford, he asked from Lady Penrith a fuller account of the *quasi-somnambulistic* vision of which he had received so mere a hint. The story, told in Eva's presence, was confirmed by her in every detail.

“Strange!” said the doctor. “There are strange coincidences no doubt, and there are stranger things in this world than mere coincidence will account for. Still, if possible, don’t lead the patient to dwell on this fancy. She may forget when she wakes; and if she does it is the best thing that can befall her. If not, Miss Dupont must on no account confirm and deepen the impression by repeating her testimony to her own contemporaneous dream. You will hear, of course, before very long whether any actual event were concurrent with the scene that passed before Miss Kavanagh in her trance. If so, it would be a favour to let me know the facts before, by dwelling on and discussing them, the two stories—the details of Miss Kavanagh’s vision and of what actually passed—are blended and identified in your minds.”

The doctor so far acted on his own counsel as to commit to writing forthwith the whole of the narrative received from Lady Penrith and from Eva. The reader has an advantage denied to him, for whom Amy could of course copy but a small portion of the letter long after received from the Confederate camp, and dated some three or four hours earlier than that of Alice’s waking; a date which, considering the difference of longitude, brings its story to coincide exactly with the period of the two girls’ concurrent dream.

Lionel to Alice.

“I know not when this may reach you; I can only trust it to a comrade, and no one of us is so likely to survive as to perish within a few days or hours. I cannot, therefore, address this; nor dare I write any-

thing which, falling into an enemy's hands, would expose you to annoyance. Pity me, Alice, for the additional risk I am obliged to run that this may never reach you, the additional restraint under which I write my last farewell: a farewell, and I dare hardly wish that it were otherwise. Don't misread me, dearest. Eternity can give nothing that could compensate the loss of what life would have in store, if your promise might be fulfilled for ever so brief a time. But I so honour you, so reverence your purity of womanhood, that if I regret, I dare not murmur at the fate which secures you from the profanation of my touch, the polluting scenes that haunt my memory. Therefore I strive to be content to die. Better so, for you, than that you should learn to know me as I now am. Not that I repent or would recal anything done in this war; least of all the oath sworn on that lonely Cross, and kept, I think, to the letter—never to rest or spare while there were Yankee soldiers to kill and Northern homes to desolate. It is God's vengeance that I have wrought, and to Him I can answer it. But you, Alice, should never bear a name so savagely hated and defamed. A hand so red as mine should never soil the whiteness of yours; never clasp you to a heart whose bitter passions, so alien to your own nature and experience, could not but grieve and shame and at last estrange your love. Best then, my own, as it has been ordered.

“I have received my warning, Alice. It was no mere vision, whether you remember it or not. My prayer has been granted; we *have* met, though only at the last and in our dreams. You would understand why

I wrote so briefly about Minnaroo and what followed; but this one thing I can tell you now, and you will know how to tell her sisters. At the last I had some few hours alone with Florence, when pain I hope and believe was over. She had said all she cared to say, heard all I could bear to speak; and towards the end she asked me to read from her—your—English Bible the closing scene of the Passion. At one point I was stopped by a slight convulsive clasp of the hand I held. I turned, saw for one moment a bright, almost joyous light in her eyes; then it faded, and the hand loosed its hold—for ever. I had hardly heeded what I was reading; but the last words she heard have rung in my memory ever since, and wakened me from many a dream as her voice seemed to utter them—the answering promise to the repentant thief. Strange! *she* had no need of them.

“I said I have had my warning. It woke me soon after midnight—early morning with you of this 7th April;—otherwise I should not be writing now. We are in retreat, hard pressed; and I was wearied, marching, fighting all day. The constant tramp of troops, waggon-trains, artillery over the bridge some half-mile hence never disturbed me for an instant; the dream woke me completely, and I could have no inclination to sleep again, even were this not my last chance to write to you. I lay by the bivonac fire when I fell asleep. I found myself looking on a scene I knew well—the view from the West front of Penrith Castle, but in a chamber I had never entered before. I could describe it if I had time and if it mattered; but over the mantelpiece was my own miniature, and

under it the crucifix I gave to Eva when we parted. You stood beside me ; she was sleeping there, her hand on the coverlet. You drew me to the bedside, and looking in your eyes for permission, I stooped and kissed it. She seemed about to awake, but you led me through a door between the bed and the window, and in the next room Eugenie and Rose were sleeping. As we stood together—you had guided me by the hand—I heard—you seemed to hear it too—the trumpet call of my own Legion, that summons us to release our picketted horses, saddle and prepare to mount. I knew this would give me a couple of minutes at least ; but you said, ‘ Kiss them and go, you will be late.’ I turned to you instead ; but you seemed to shrink from me—not strangely ; and in an instant I was far away on my favourite black charger, galloping for life up a long smooth slope, closely pursued I knew, but neither knew nor cared by what. Suddenly I became aware that the slope ended in a precipice or gulf, utterly dark, though there was a clear sunset sky above. Horror came over me ; I dared not look behind or pause ; yet I knew I was galloping to certain death. Suddenly, beyond the gulf, became visible a scene like that of blue mountains in the sunniest distance, and yet but some few yards in front. There Florence stood, holding out her arms as if I could reach across that vast black abyss ; and she spoke—not called—in her natural sweet low voice the last words she had heard on earth : ‘ This day shalt thou be with me.’ Before she had ended I had spurred my horse into space, felt myself falling, flung towards her the colours she herself embroidered, which somehow were in my hand, and—woke.

“Best so, Alice. Still, it does seem hard even on me, to whom life promised so much and has given so little ; hard above all on you, who have wasted your youth in waiting for a hope never to be fulfilled. And yet better death than the disappointment you would have known. Don’t think I fear to die ; except to lose you. Even timid men must grow callous to death who have looked it in the face on so many fields, who have been so close to it as every man among us has been daily for the last six months. But to leave the brightest hope that life could offer—even that visionary kiss refused ! Perhaps even in a dream it was not fit. . . . That is the trumpet of my dream ; it announces the beginning of my last day’s work. Before you receive this you will know that all is lost here : I hope I may add, *fors l’honneur*. My darling—for the last time, my own,—farewell !”

CHAPTER XVIII.

SUNSET.

“ He stood the cast his rashness played,
Left not the victims he had made,
Dug his red grave with his own blade,
And on the field he lost was laid,
Abhorred—but not despised.”

THEIR ranks, refilled again and again, once more sorely thinned at Five Forks, where their splendid charge upon the enemy's formidable artillery had elicited from FitzLee himself the “well done, d'Ultramar!” that the young soldier prized beyond all other forms of honour, reward, or fame, the Legion—so composed of recruits from every State in the Confederacy and from half the countries of Europe that it could bear no regular name but that of its leader—occupied an open field on the Western bank of a deep, narrow Virginian stream, unfordable but spanned by a wide, strong wooden railway-bridge. Over this, during the whole of the night between the 6th and 7th of April, the retreating forces of the Confederacy—forty-five thousand men when they were driven into the lines around Richmond and Petersburg, fewer than twenty-eight thousand when they commenced their retreat, and now dwindled down to not

more than half that number—filed on their way to a refuge they rather strove than hoped to reach. The *reveillée* beaten among the infantry in the neighbourhood gave a signal that was answered by their own clarion; and rising to his feet as the latter sounded, Colonel d'Ultramar folded and sealed a letter and gave it into the hands of Captain James, who still accompanied him, and had earned an honourable place among the bravest subalterns of the splendid cavalry of the Army of Northern Virginia, a cavalry not surpassed in the world for dash, daring, and practical efficiency.

“I dare not,” he said, “address it. There is no name within or without; but you will not accompany me longer, and you know to whom to give it. I have orders to send an officer to Danville with despatches for General ——, and I have chosen you that you may deliver this.”

“Hard on me, Colonel. I have nothing to live for, and there are many of ours who have.”

“They,” answered his commander, “are Southerners. I decline to sacrifice an English life where it is mere sacrifice; where even your daring, steadiness, and skill can render no valuable service. You know as well as I do, as every man in the army knows, that all is lost—that though we must still struggle to reach a point where possibly our Chief thinks we may hold out for better terms, success in that is scarcely conceivable, and any further success the wildest of dreams. You carry also my testimony to your services, endorsed by FitzLee in terms that are perhaps, next to the Cross you already wear, the highest honour a soldier

could receive. It is a pity the Confederacy has no visible tokens of distinction for the best and noblest soldiers that ever fought for a losing cause. Now, James, don't pain me by remonstrating; I tell you if you could save my life, if I knew that I was throwing it away in dismissing you, for my own sake I would still send you. To have that letter delivered, without so directing it that an enemy could find out for whom it is meant, is now my dearest aim in this world. Now mount and report yourself to the General and——” He drew from his breast the precious locket that contained Alice's hair and miniature. He gave it without speaking. His comrade could not look into the face he loved best on earth; for now, for the first time since he had been a soldier, he knew that his own eyes were full of tears. At this moment the hardened veteran felt perhaps the sharpest pang of his life, for he knew how utterly his dearly loved comrade and commander had resigned all hope when he gave up such a possession.

“I keep one thing of hers, the scarf; but this”—he took from the breast of his tunic a tiny silver box—“this you will ask her to give to Eva Dupont; it contains the first and last tokens of her sister's friendship. Now go at once—farewell.”

The earnest brief hand-clasp spoke as much feeling as Englishmen ever, no matter how deep their friendship, how painful their parting, display to men or before men; and then the last visible link with his former life and its dearest interests vanished from the eyes of the Confederate soldier. His men were now drawn up in order and he rode to their head.

Francis, who had joined him as a private, was, through the havoc of a hundred desperate conflicts, now his second in command; and to him alone Colonel d'Ultramar spoke.

"Don't throw away lives for nothing to-day, Francis; neither your own nor that of any other man who has something to live for. A mother's last support and hope in life, the bread, the happiness of wives and children, are too dear, too sacred to be sacrificed to a point of honour or of fantasy, when the possibility of serving our country is so nearly at an end as it is now. Most of us, as you know, have little or nothing to regret in life; but those who have must not be wantonly sacrificed."

"There is not a man," the young officer answered, "who will leave you, Colonel, or the colours. If you want us to care for ourselves, you will have to set the example."

"I fancy you will understand," his comrade replied, wearily, "what I mean when the critical moment comes. At any rate, if I am not living then, remember what I have said. When you have done your duty, don't take the weight of innocent blood on your soul for nothing."

"You speak as if you were doomed: and you have ridden safe through as hard fields as we are likely to meet with to-day."

"No, Francis. Sheridan's cavalry, outnumbering our whole force of all arms, are pressing us, if they have not headed us. Lee hopes still, or he would surrender."

"Never!" cried the young Louisianian. "Better die fighting!"

"He," replied the Colonel, "the very pattern of Christian chivalry, understands his responsibilities better. He will fight while there is a hope that fighting can be of use to his country. He will save his men's lives, when that is the last service he can render her."

Francis looked wistfully, wonderingly into the grave, sad face of one but six or seven years his senior, which had always looked so sternly on the worst chances of battle, so eagerly on the approach of conflict, so coldly on slaughter, so resolutely even on the havoc wrought in his own ranks.

Certainly, he thought, Colonel d'Ultramar had seemed to feel heavily the loss of nearly all his earlier friends, of almost every officer and the great majority of the soldiers to whom, in the first years of the war, he had been linked by the ties of personal intimacy or simple comradeship. But the present mood of one whose eyes had ever lightened at the gleam of naked steel, whose blood had ever seemed to warm at the approach of the enemy's fire, surprised and almost awed him. The sad, thoughtful eyes brightened presently as, with the two or three remaining officers of his staff, one of the ablest of those Lieutenants who had succeeded to the places of Stonewall Jackson, Stuart, and Hill killed, and Longstreet disabled, rode down swiftly from the direction in which were known to lie the quarters of the Commander-in-Chief. "There comes our work and my release," said the Colonel quietly.

Francis saluted and reined back as the General approached; noting with some little surprise that the

staff had done the same, that the General evidently intended to speak alone to the commander of the Legion.

“Colonel d’Ultramar, the enemy are close on our rear, and still some precious trains, and artillery which could do little at this point, are on the other side of the bridge. It is to be blown up, but not till the last moment; if possible not till after the last trains have passed. We must leave a rear-guard to hold it until this is done; and that rear-guard—well, in plain language, they must be sacrificed, surrender, or disperse. Your work is to cover the bridge from the other side. Cover it to the last: if you are utterly beaten before the trains and cannon have passed, give the signal for its destruction; but don’t do so till the last moment, till you can hold the enemy back no longer. Of course such of you as can may cross it then.”

He paused, and the other saluted in silence, as one who has received and understands the order he intends to carry out to the letter.

“Do you understand me?” the General added in a low tone. “The bridge once blown up, your work is done. If you could rejoin us, it would matter little, except to yourselves. If a way be open, save yourselves. The fate of the army is a mere matter of time, and will probably be decided before you could rejoin; if, the bridge destroyed, you could possibly get clear of the enemy.”

“I understand, General”—as the other seemed to wait for a reply. “I don’t think you will see one of us on this side the river again, unless, at the last, it

be found possible to save the colours. If *they* are brought back to you, tell General Lee that we have done our duty."

His commander, who knew him earlier and better than others, and esteemed him more highly for other and finer qualities than the mere courage and skill admired by the entire Confederate army, was a little surprised by what seemed more than calmness and composure; the apparently absolute indifference with which a soldier so young, not by birth a Southerner, reputed rich, certainly handsome, loved by women, respected perforce by men, accepted what he must know to be an almost unconditional death-warrant.

"I hate this duty," he said, almost passionately; "but you know, as I do, it is duty—harder for me perhaps than even for you."

"Very much so," Colonel d'Ultramar replied. "I thank you, General; you give us the place of honour; and if this be our last battle, I think I can promise you that the honour of the Starry Cross shall be maintained to the last."

He rode to the head of his Legion, formed them in column, and having with some difficulty cleared the passage, led them across the bridge. Some half-mile from it, a wooded ridge, forming the lesser part of a semicircle, covered and concealed the further bank of the river from the North and East. To the South-East the ground was comparatively open, and it was from this direction that the Confederate trains, and a few shrunken battalions and batteries mixed with them, were slowly filing in retreat. D'Ultramar dismounted one half of his men, and placed them per-

sonally and with extreme care in the best positions for the defence of the ridge. The remainder, some four hundred strong, were kept standing by their horses in the immediate vicinity of the river ; leaving the passage free but watching the open ground, and ready to strike at once at any enemy approaching in that direction. A couple of hours had passed, when a rattling rifle-fire on his left told the Colonel that an attempt was being made to force the ridge. He rode up and scanned earnestly the character of the attack. The enemy outnumbered his men by five or six to one, but, advancing over open ground, seemed to hesitate and waver ; and, picked off one by one by marksmen whose aim hardly ever failed, were not pressing forward resolutely, suffering of course more, as is always the case, for their irresolution than if they had rushed boldly on at once. A mark for their fire as he rode slowly along his own line, no bullet touched him, and the black charger endured almost as coolly as his rider the hail of balls that cut twigs and leaves from the trees around, behind, in front, and whizzed constantly in the closest proximity to his ears. He started, however, as one bullet struck the saddle and, turned aside by the revolver in the holster, very slightly grazed his neck. "Steady, Lancival," said his master, patting him. "I thought so, by Jove ! this was meant to occupy us while they throw cavalry on the trains." He galloped down to the head of his main body, who had already mounted, formed in a double line. A body of the enemy's cavalry were threatening the trains still slowly making their way to the bridge. Unaware that any considerable mounted

force was in their neighbourhood, they were approaching with more eagerness than order, and fell into some little confusion as they suddenly perceived the Lancers facing them at some five furlongs' distance.

“Keep your squadron in reserve, Francis. Support us if we need it. Sound the charge!” cried the Colonel, seizing the momentary opportunity.

The Lancers dashed forward. Their opponents, Yankees from New England, northern New York, and Pennsylvania, few of whom had ever mounted a horse till enlisted as cavalry in the latter part of the war, had been accustomed to dismount and use the rifle, not to fight on horseback. They had come to attack trains and limbered artillery, at most to encounter the fire of an infantry escort; and were confounded and dismayed on this, the first occasion on which they had been called to use the weapons or confront the charge of cavalry. Their officers could hardly form them in time to get into a sort of shambling trot wherewith to meet the thundering gallop of the perfectly dressed Confederate line. The unequal collision threw them at once into utter confusion. Their numbers were so superior that the individual hand-to-hand fighting of the braver among them gave the assailants enough to do for some three or four minutes, at the end of which time the Yankee force was scattered, the vast majority having turned their horses' heads and made “a strategic movement to the rear” which was not arrested till they were far out of sight of an enemy too judicious to pursue them. The victors raised a loud shout of derision as their commander imperatively halted them to re-form.

“ Silence, men,” he cried, “ and listen. You have scattered that *canaille* pretty easily : but there are better cavalry than those in Sheridan’s corps. Have you forgotten the Dutchmen at Five Forks ? *They* will not be beaten by shouting ; and we shall have them here when Sheridan learns what has become of those fellows.”

The Lancers having resumed their position, their commander rode once more along the line where the dismounted horsemen still with comparative ease maintained their critical position. This forced, the bridge would be inevitably lost. The enemy, by bringing up even light artillery to the ridge, would be sure of dispersing any force that might attempt for a moment to hold that bank of the river, and would so command the bridge as to destroy all who attempted to cross it. But their infantry had been beaten back or had given way, and the commander of the defenders at once perceived that they were about to bring up field artillery to a point out of reach of his rifles but from which they could shell the ridge.

“ Lie down,” he cried, “ and keep close, so long as they confine themselves to artillery fire. Have you ammunition ? ”

“ Not enough,” said the officer to whom he spoke, in a low tone, “ for a long defence.”

“ I will send you some. Pass the word to the men that they shall be supplied.”

He rode down to the train that was at that moment passing, and with some difficulty succeeded in diverting to his own use a sufficient quantity of the store of cartridges, captured not long ago from the enemy,

that were destined to supply the retreating Army of Northern Virginia in view of a possible battle. These despatched to the men on the ridge, he noted with comparative indifference the constant bursting of shells in the wood, aware that, covered as his men were, the slaughter could not be great, and relying with absolute confidence on the steadiness of such veteran troops against the panic which it is the chief use of shells to inspire among sheltered infantry unsupported by artillery. At last, however, the shells came flying over the trees, and while two burst above the mounted Lancers, several more whizzed over their heads; one striking the bridge and doing no little mischief there, the others plunging harmlessly into the stream or beyond it. At the same time he noted that the defenders of the ridge had sprung up and were firing with all their former eagerness, reckless of the consequent exposure. "The batteries have come nearer," he said. Placing himself at the head of his men, again formed in two divisions, the second considerably in rear, and ordering the latter to wheel on the right flank of the first just before the enemy's fire should be delivered, he swept round the end of the ridge, whose elevation and the trees upon it screened his small mounted force from the observation of the gunners. They were nearer than he thought, and had not time to limber and wheel their guns so as to bear effectively upon him, before he dashed among them. The gunners ran, however, escaping with comparatively little loss. The caissons were dragged off by their horses; and with the guns themselves he could do little or nothing, since he

dared not await the advance of a body of infantry visible at no great distance ; aware that, if steadily handled, their fire would annihilate his small force, and render the longer maintenance of his all-important position impossible. His charge, therefore, did little more than relieve the defenders of the ridge for an hour or so from the harassing but not very destructive artillery fire.

And now the sun was descending towards the West, the last train was filing over the bridge, when his eyes, drawn in the direction from whence it had come, observed the approach of a column of Federal cavalry, certainly twice as strong as his own force. Scanning them carefully through his field-glass, he recognized a well-known enemy ; too fond of the rifle, and averse to as little experienced in close hand-to-hand conflict, but brave and resolute in their own fashion of fighting. A minute sufficed to form his resolution on more points than one.

“ Afzul,” he said, turning to his orderly. “ Ah ! you are badly wounded. Cross the bridge. Don’t come back ; I forbid you to return. Tell the officer in charge to blow it up at once. I will keep the enemy at bay for five minutes ; I can promise no more.” He saw Afzul salute and depart, and then turned to his men.

“ We have one thing more to do, and only one. We must drive back those horsemen, cut through them, or perish man by man in keeping them back for five minutes. After that our work is done. The bridge will be blown up, and we cannot rejoin the army ; nor would it much matter if we could. To

some of you life is worth having, and there are many whose duty it is to live, now that their death cannot serve their country. I shall try to cut through. Those who get clear have my positive command to disperse to their homes ; or if they meet the enemy in force, to surrender. Before many days are over, a general capitulation will release them. Charge !”

The enemy hesitated. They had not time to dismount and form in their favourite order ; and lacked decision, spirit, or perhaps merely promptitude to encounter so formidable an adversary in his own fashion. The result was fatal to them. Keeping perfect order to the last, despite their tremendous speed, the Lancers broke and pierced the line ; no small number of them actually cutting their way through and emerging in the rear. The way of escape was apparently open to these, but not a man adopted the Colonel's counsel, or regarded his command. They turned back, assisting in the overthrow of their antagonists instead of regarding their own safety ; and after a short, sharp, and sanguinary struggle the Federals were broken and scattered. As the Confederates wheeled, returning to their post, a vast sheet of flame suddenly burst forth ; a tremendous thunder-crash, then a thick volume of smoke amid which blazing fragments of wood were hurled in every direction, told that their work was practically done ; the bridge was blown up and the Confederate trains were safe.

The fact was apparent to the enemy, and checked their further movements for a time, probably till the occurrence was reported to their General. To work

out his plan, to complete the net he was drawing round the relics of the Virginian army, the stream must be crossed higher or lower, or both, where fords might be found or bridges constructed. However promptly this might be done, it would be too late to intercept the trains, and it was probable that the retreating force might be found drawn up in a position suitable for defence. To attack it in such a position was no longer the aim of the Commander-in-Chief, or of the able subordinate who was pressing on the retreat. The former had attacked the Confederate lines over and over again with overwhelming numbers, and had been signally beaten on every occasion. His policy in so doing has since been vindicated on the ground that he could afford to throw away three lives for one, and that, in wearing out by such a course the strength of an army that could no longer be recruited, he was playing a sure and skilful if a cruel and very expensive game. But now the game was won; check-mate was a question only of days or hours; and the same cold calculating temper that could deliberately sacrifice fifty thousand lives in defeat after defeat to destroy one-third of that number, restrained all idea of a premature development of the final moves. It was probably therefore the decision of the Commander of the Federal cavalry simply to throw upon the Southern rear-guard a force sufficient to compel its surrender. That this would be easily done could hardly seem doubtful to one who knew their numbers with tolerable accuracy, and knew also that retreat was impossible, and escape, even by utter dispersal, almost equally so.

There was therefore no further pressure on the force that held the ridge ; both batteries and infantry were withdrawn beyond reach of fire, and the Confederate leader, promptly observing this, ordered the men to mount, and formed his Legion, or rather its relics, less now than the original strength of a single regiment, in line between the river's bank and the nearest part of the ridge, facing South-Eastward. No enemy were actually within sight. On the other side of the river suddenly appeared a group of riders among whom the devoted Confederates recognized their adored General. They could not read the expression of his face at that distance ; but, made aware by a movement among them that some incident of interest was occurring in that direction, their leader turned his field-glass on the group, and fancied that he could discern an expression of suppressed but bitter pain on the face of him who, under a stern and cruel sense of duty, had doomed them to a fate he would fain have shared. Raising his sword in salute, Lionel gave the signal to his men, and three ringing cheers, sharper and shriller in tone than those of Englishmen or Northerners, and known by that peculiarity as the "Rebel yell," saluted for the last time the peerless Chief under whose eyes every man of that loyal army was more than ready to die. Then their Colonel turned and faced them.

"We cannot possibly rejoin them," he said. "All the fords will be occupied, and there is none within some miles of us. There is no more to be done, and I had rather not sacrifice in a mere combat of despair lives that are precious to others than their owners.

Those of you who have mothers, wives, and children for whom it is a duty to live, and all who care to survive their country, fall out now, and try whether singly or together you cannot get away. Even if made prisoners you will pretty surely be released before long."

Not a man stirred; and looking on the stern set faces Colonel d'Ultramar felt that something more was required from him.

"Major Francis, you are the last child of your widowed mother. She has given enough to the Cause, and nothing more can be done for it. You have not the right to throw your life away: set the example. Men, there is no shame, no want of faith or courage in disbanding now; I order those who have homes, who have others dependent on them, to turn and leave me. I will not have their blood upon my soul."

"Colonel," replied Major Francis, aloud, "for once, for the first and the last time, I refuse to obey your order. My mother would not recognize her son, the brother of two brave men who have fallen under your command, in a deserter."

The speech was answered by a shout of assent from the whole regiment. A look of bitter regret and pain came over their leader's face.

"You cast a heavy load on my conscience," he said. "God acquit me of your blood; I have enough to answer for. For God's sake, Francis," he added, in a lower tone. "This is the last chance; there comes our fate."

A brigade of cavalry, in the blue uniform, had wheeled round the point where, some two miles

distant, a line of trees, some farm buildings, and the conformation of the ground formed a screen for the enemy's movements; and directly confronted the Lancers, with nothing but open ground between them. They moved regularly, firmly, evenly, if not with all the exquisite precision, yet with all the substantial accuracy and steadiness of the English light cavalry that formed Lionel's own model of perfection; and not only he but all behind him recognized the one corps in the Federal army which they regarded with respect, the only horsemen that had held their own with the Legion on anything like equal terms; the "Dutchmen" or Germans who had crossed swords with them a few days before at Five Forks. A hearty cheer from the Confederates greeted "foemen worthy of their steel;" and both sides advanced, slowly.

Within some half-mile, just as Colonel d'Ultramar was about to bid his trumpet sound the charge, the Germans halted, and to his extreme surprise sent forward a flag of truce accompanied by the General himself. D'Ultramar rode out alone to meet him.

"Surrender, Sir," said his opponent in excellent English, with a German accent scarcely perceptible. "You have done the work you were sent to do. You are surrounded; our own force is, as you must see, sufficient to destroy you utterly. It would be a frantic waste of life to persist."

The Confederate leader listened quietly but coldly; his eyes, though fixed on his adversary's countenance, seemed to look not at but through him, at some dim prospect in the infinite distance.

“We know all that,” he said. “I thank you, nevertheless.”

“Darcy!” cried the other; and Colonel d’Ultramar started at the name unheard for years. “For God’s sake, surrender! Don’t force an old friend and comrade to give orders for your own death, and what will be no better than the massacre of your men.”

“You need have no scruples on that score, General Von Arnheim. My men will take care to reconcile the matter to your consciences.”

“So much the worse!” answered the German, greatly agitated. “What right have you to destroy life on either side to no earthly purpose? How will you answer for what is no better than suicide in you, and the reckless butchery of some hundreds of gallant men? Surrender, Darcy; I have influence enough to ensure your life, much more those of your officers.” He came as close as comrade or brother might have done, and touched his antagonist’s sword-arm with his weaponless hand as he continued in a low tone: “Darcy—I was at Lord Penrith’s house in London before I left Europe. For *her* sake, surrender.”

“Tell her, Von Arnheim, that I chose to die as became him who was honoured by her love. Now go back to your men. The instant I rejoin mine, you will hear my trumpet sound the charge.”

The German turned away with a heavy sigh, an expression of deep pain and sorrow visible on his hard, rugged, manly countenance. Its pallor, its evident look of suffering startled all those of his men who were cool enough to look upon it, as he returned to their head.

“Make prisoners if you can, rather than kill,” he said. “A thousand dollars to him who will bring me that Confederate Colonel alive and unhurt; five hundred if you can take him living.”

Colonel d’Ultramar paused once again in front of his line. “Men,” he repeated, facing them, “those who will surrender are free to do so. Let them part from us.”

Not a man stirred.

“Then,” he said, “do your best; strike hard and strike home, and rally to the last around the colours. Remember who looks on.”

He was mistaken there, or his orders might have been interfered with. The Confederate Commander-in-Chief, the noblest Christian and soldier of his age, would hardly have permitted that useless suicide of a whole regiment under his own eyes. The awful overwhelming weight of the force they were about to attack pressed on the spirits of men prepared to die, but painfully conscious of the impossibility of success, of the certainty of an almost ignominious defeat. Their chief felt their mood, and, determined that their last exploit should be as brilliant as any they had performed, appealed to their pride by the familiar name, which they had heard often in praise or reproach, in taunt or admiration, from the lips of friend or foe, but never from his. Waving his hand to the trumpeter beside him, he shouted—

“Forward, the Devil’s Own!—Charge!”

The moment the note of their clarion was heard it was answered; and the Germans, as well mounted, as well led, almost as well disciplined and seasoned

as themselves, but outnumbering them by three to one, dashed forward at a gallop scarcely less furious than theirs. The lines met front to front, and in half a minute nearly every man in the front rank on either side, and more than half the horses, were rolling on the ground. The Confederate chief had cloven his way into the second rank, a couple of his best soldiers beside him, and with them, as even in that moment he recognized with bitter regret, the second in command he had been so anxious to save. His splendid black charger, the tallest and most powerful there, his well-known figure, the swift heavy strokes of his long two-edged sword clearing once and again a space about him, marked out that spot as a rallying point for his followers; and they closed as far as possible around him in a dense mass, no longer preserving even the form of military order, each man striking for life and for vengeance with all his remaining strength. They went down, of course, one by one, crowded on front and flanks and almost on the rear. Broken up into small bodies, fighting hard to the last, disabling, perhaps, more than their own number of the enemy, those who still surrounded the colours were beaten back step by step almost to the river's bank. Then for an instant the enemy so far opened and recoiled as to leave room for free movement to the survivors; and Lionel, looking round, saw that not more than a score or so of his men still gathered round his standard, now borne by Major Francis."

* "Once more," he cried. "Charge!"

There was no space, however, to obtain the impetus

that had made that charge so formidable; and by sheer weight, and the overwhelming numbers of the enemy, more than by use of weapons, they were forced back, till only five or six clustered on the very edge of the river, whose dark rapid current whirled along a foot or two below them, around the well-known battle-flag—recognized with a thrill of strangely mingled feeling by nearly every soldier in the hostile ranks—the Confederate Starry Cross on the crimson field, with the broad black crape border that distinguished the Devil's Own.

“Once more, surrender!” cried the German commander, parrying a blow aimed by one of the few survivors. “Surrender, Colonel d’Ultramar! This is suicide or massacre, not war.”

“Too late!” was the only answer.

The setting sun flashed its last rays in the eyes of the Germans, and gave a moment's advantage to the defenders of the standard. As he parried a sabre thrust, and cut down with his own more formidable weapon the man who delivered it, the Confederate leader heard a smothered cry beside him, and saw Francis with the colours reeling from the saddle. True to the end, as throughout that day, to the tradition of his ancestry, ever

“Calm when life is on the cast,
Deadliest when they strike their last,”

he snatched the staff from his friend's relaxing grasp; flung his empty revolver right in the teeth of his nearest opponent, hurling him senseless from the saddle; struck right and left two mortal blows, with

the last of which his sword shivered almost to the hilt; and then the sword-arm fell broken to his side. The colours held firmly in that which grasped the reins, he pulled back his horse with all his might and fell with a heavy splash into the river.

“Halt! stop, dastards!” cried Von Arnheim to some of his men, who unslung their rifles to fire. “Murderers! do you call yourselves soldiers and fire on such an enemy when disarmed and helpless?” He looked anxiously for the horse and rider, and felt some hope as he saw the latter still keeping the saddle and inducing the charger to throw his head above the stream. Two or three men—one of whom he recognized even at that moment and in that light as Darcy’s Indian servant and fellow-soldier—ran down the further bank, reckless of their own danger, to assist and save their comrade. Controlled perhaps by their leader’s late rebuke, perhaps by their own better feelings, now that a few moments’ pause had cooled the passion of hand-to-hand fighting, the Germans forbore to fire. Presently Von Arnheim saw the black charger gallop riderless along the opposite shore, and entertained little doubt that, however wounded, his friend had at least been saved from the stream.

* * * * *

An hour afterwards a group of Confederate staff-officers were gathered round the Commander-in-Chief, still in the saddle, when they observed a rider in the well-known uniform with the red and black facings approach them, carrying the equally well-known standard. To their surprise they observed that the trooper’s face was dark as that of a mulatto; and yet

he bore no other resemblance to the race whom their defeat was about finally to emancipate.

“Colonel d’Ultramar’s Indian comrade and constant attendant,” said the General who had conveyed the fatal order to the rear-guard.

Afzul approached, dismounted with extreme difficulty, and reeling with wounds and weakness, saluted and held forth the standard.

“Colonel d’Ultramar’s last desire,” he said, “was to deliver the colours into your hands,” addressing himself to the immediate superior of his chief, who had stepped forward a pace or two from the rest.

“You rescued it?” inquired one of the principal staff-officers.

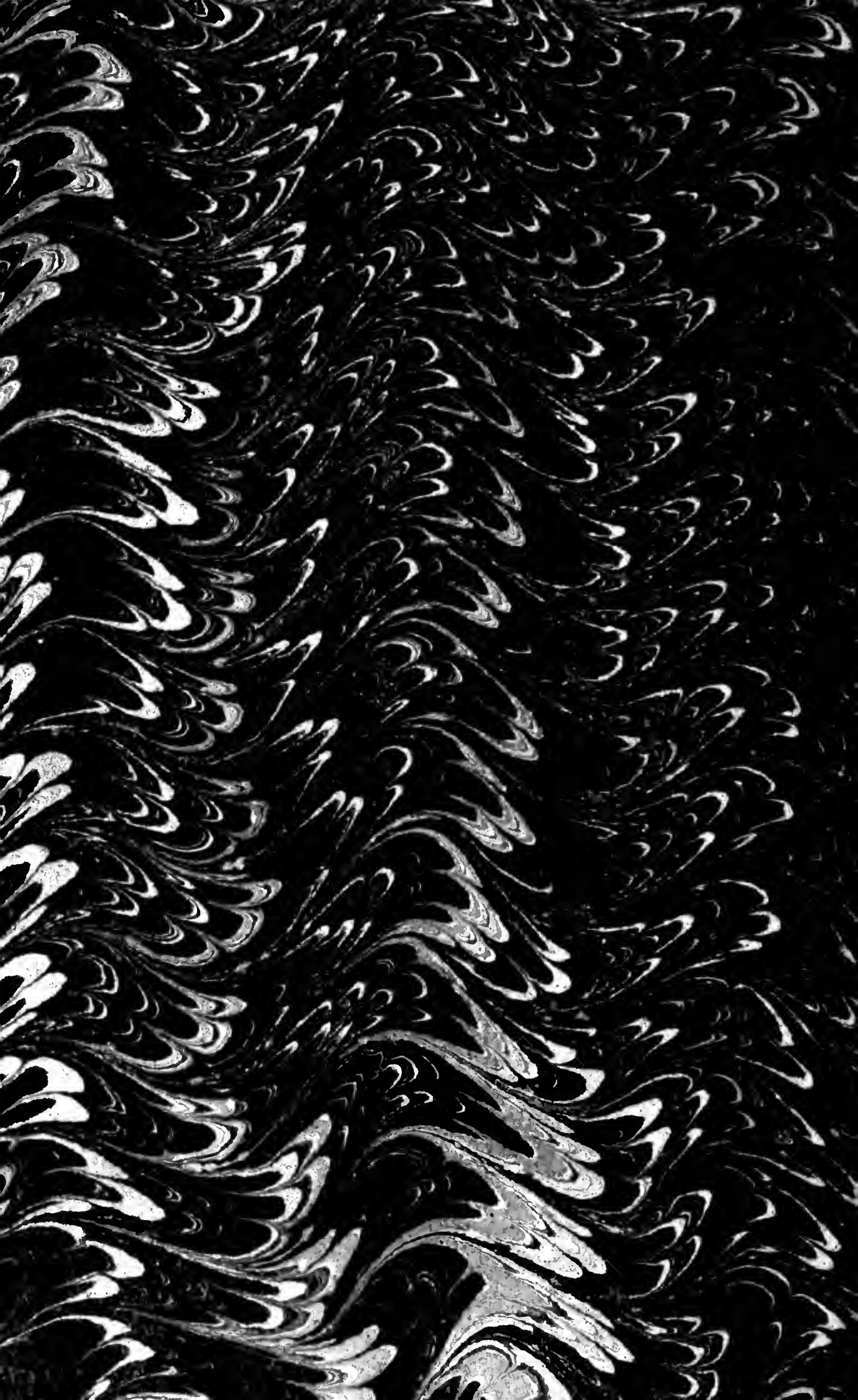
“No, sir. The Colonel sent me with an order across the bridge, and forbade me to return. I should have disobeyed him, but the order was to blow up the bridge and it was carried out at once. I could not swim. When it was all over, when the Dutch cut them down to a man, the Colonel reined back his horse into the stream with this in one hand—the sword-arm broken. We ran down—they might have shot us all, but did not—and got hold of the horse’s bridle. But he was out of the saddle; and then one not wounded as I am dashed into the stream and caught hold of the staff. We should have drawn him to shore, but when he saw that the colours were safe, he——”

Speaking so faintly that only a few of those nearest him caught the last words, the wounded soldier fell to the ground. He never spoke again; and despite all the care which under such circumstances the surgeon,

especially enjoined to save him if possible, could bestow, he did not survive more than a couple of hours the master he had so devotedly loved and served.

“This, then,” said Lionel’s immediate commander, with a sadness even deeper than that with which he had that morning parted from the leader of the doomed Legion, his voice trembling, while those next him thought, even in that rapidly darkening twilight, there were tears in his eyes, “this, then, is all that remains of Lionel d’Ultramar and the Devil’s Own !”

THE END.





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